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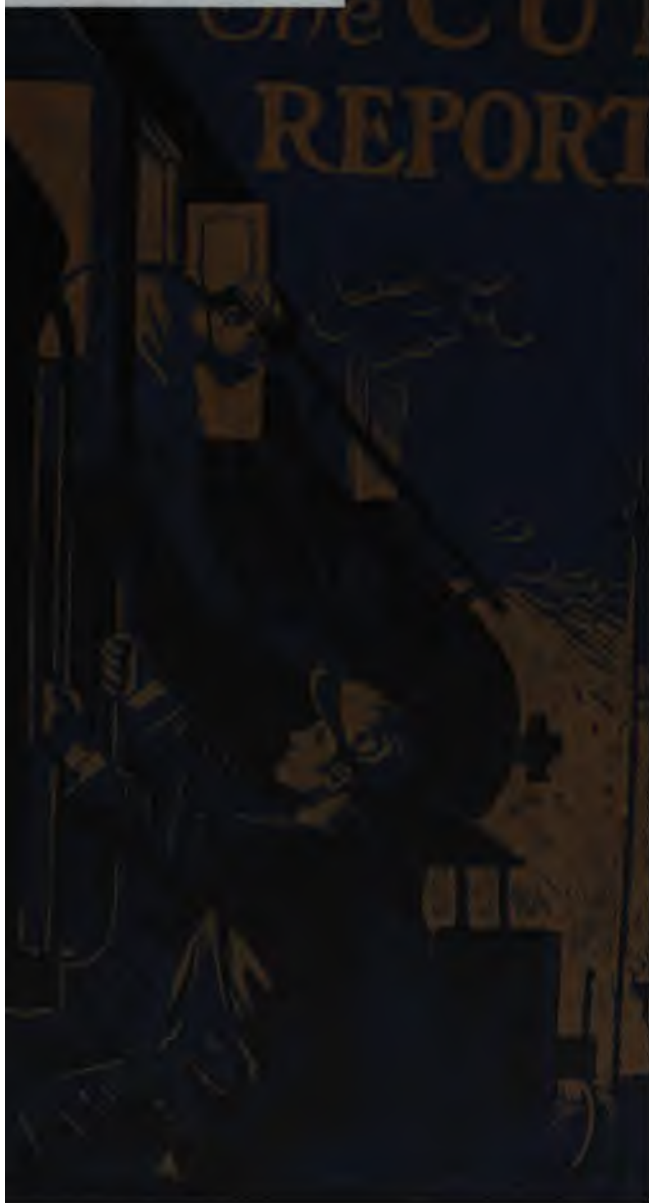
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The CU REPORT







THE CUB REPORTER



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"'GET OFF THAT STEP, OR I'LL PUT YOU OFF!'"—Page 50

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THE CUB REPORTER

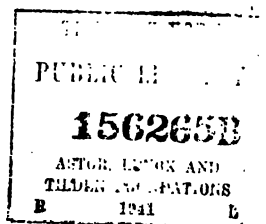
BY
EDWARD MOTT WOOLLEY
AUTHOR OF "THE JUNIOR PARTNER," "DONALD
KIRK," "THE WINNING TEN," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ARTHUR HUTCHINS



NEW YORK
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September, 1913

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THE CUB REPORTER

CHAPTER I

THE THROUGH TRAIN

THE train was moving as Dent Lockwood bounded up the station steps and swung himself aboard. Luckily, the Pullman porter had not yet closed the vestibule. Very much out of breath, Dent made his way through the long chain of sleeping-cars and found a seat in one of the forward day-coaches. It was midnight, but he had only an hour's ride ahead.

It was very comfortable here on the train, and the young man settled down with a sigh of contentment. A hard task it had been, this Bridgeport assignment, but the difficult part of it was done. The actual writing of the story would be simple enough. He would have his copy ready by the time he reached New York, and for once Hopson could find no fault with him. Hopson was city editor of the *Morning Sentinel*.

For a few minutes Dent rested, with his head

on the back of the seat. A very close shave it had been, this race for the train. If he had missed it, he would have had to send his story by wire, and stay in Bridgeport all night. But Hopson had told him specifically to bring his copy in himself. There were a number of big telegraph stories scheduled, and the night editor wanted to relieve the wires all he could. Dent smiled to himself; it was pleasant to reflect that he was obeying orders implicitly. Besides, he had a good lively news-story. It was the story of a quick-witted girl who had averted a fire-panic and perhaps saved the lives of scores of working people. It was by far the most important assignment Hopson had ever given Dent, for the latter was merely the *Sentinel's* cub reporter.

A very wholesome sort of cub he seemed now, as he got out his bunch of copy-paper, and commenced to write, with his knee for a desk. He was not much over eighteen, but well developed physically. His shoulders were broad and symmetrical, his figure erect, and his chest expansive. In a few years, if he kept on at this rate, he would be a big fellow, indeed. Even now, he towered over Hopson, his chief.

In features, however, Dent was not exactly handsome. True, in men, strength of character



is of itself good looks. Dent Lockwood did have strength clearly marked in his face, though it would have been difficult, perhaps, to define it. His jaw might have indicated a dogged faculty of hanging on, once he took hold of a thing; his mouth, which was rather large, might have shown good humor and a large capacity for achieving; his nose, prominent and straight, had a touch of authority. His gray eyes were commanding, rather than questioning. Altogether, one would have picked Dent without hesitation for success.

Strangely enough, the reverse seemed to be the case. Dent was not successful as a cub reporter. During the six months he had been an apprentice in the city room of the *Sentinel*, he had made a most wretched failure of it. So, at least, Hopson told him. He had done everything wrong, made the most atrocious blunders ever committed in a newspaper office, and shown himself fit, as Hopson expressed it, to be printer's devil for a country weekly. Nor did the city editor make any secret of his views on these points. So often had he expressed himself on the subject that Dent had almost come to take himself in this light.

Just now, however, he had really done something worth while. Perhaps, after all, he reflected, he might be of some account to the

Sentinel. For a minute he laid aside his paper and pencil while he took off his overcoat and hung it on the baggage-rack over the window. Dent was a careful dresser, and his natty gray suit was scrupulously pressed. He was inclined a trifle to the extreme, and his trousers were turned up over his bluchers in a broad band. His cap, worn over a heavy pompadour, was somewhat nifty in its plaids, and his collar seemed a bit too high for comfort.

He was busily writing again when the conductor came through.

"Ticket!" the train autocrat said, as Dent failed to look up. "Ticket, please."

The boy tucked his pencil into his upper waistcoat pocket and reached for some change.

"New York!" he said, laconically. "I didn't have time to buy a ticket—came near missing the train, as it was. How much is the cash fare to New York?"

The conductor shifted his lantern.

"To get to New York," he observed, "you go west. At the present moment you are on the road to Boston."

The pad of copy-paper fell to the floor. Two or three passengers, behind and in front of him, roused themselves sleepily.

"Boston?" demanded Dent, dazed. "Why, doesn't this—this train go to New York?"

"New York," reiterated the conductor, "is west of Connecticut. You are in Connecticut now, and headed very close to east. You are going away from New York at the rate of sixty miles an hour, I should judge."

The train, indeed, was lurching and swaying in a manner that corroborated the man's words. He braced his feet to prevent being thrown against the seats.

The boy stood up suddenly, his face pale.

"Do you really mean it?" he demanded, incredulously. "You aren't joking?"

"Joking?" The conductor smiled pityingly. "My boy, do you think I would perpetrate such a joke on a passenger? You're on the wrong train, without any doubt. It's to be hoped that you've no important engagement in New York to-night."

He glanced meaningly at the bunch of copy-paper on the floor. The conductor was an old hand on the road; he had seen many newspaper men, and knew the signs.

"But I have an engagement in New York!" Dent exclaimed. "I'm a *Sentinel* man, and I've got to be in the office by one-thirty, at the latest. I—I—"

He paused, remembering that the last train to New York was due at Bridgeport at a minute past midnight. The watch he now held in his hand showed the time to be 12:11.

"There's no way to do it," he finished, with a half groan. "I don't see how I made such a fool of myself. I was late in reaching the station, you see, and I must have been turned around and got the wrong platform. I'll have to get off at New Haven and put my stuff on the wire."

"This train doesn't stop at New Haven," the conductor informed him. "We're on a new schedule; the next stop is Providence."

"Providence!" Dent's voice was horrified. "Why, that's two or three hours away, isn't it?"

"We're due there at two forty-two."

"Two forty-two!" The boy's tones were rather faint. "See here, Mr. Conductor, that would give me only three minutes to file my story at the telegraph office and get it in to New York. I might just as well file it at two forty-two tomorrow afternoon, for all the good it would do. You'll stop the train for me at New Haven, won't you?"

"No," returned the conductor; "not without orders. This train runs from New York to Boston in four hours and a half, and it's the first

schedule we've had that jumps New Haven. I can't stop there without orders."

Dent's face presented a curious picture. He stooped and gathered his scattered sheets. He was the center of many eyes, and he sat down to escape some of them.

"Then just slow down and let me jump off," he suggested.

"Can't do that, either; the rules are strict on letting passengers off in that fashion. If you broke your back, you'd turn around and sue the company."

"No," insisted Dent, imploringly, "I'll agree—"

But the conductor had gone along down the aisle. He would be back in a few minutes, the boy thought, for his fare to Providence. Well, here, indeed, was a brilliant situation! Here was the fitting climax of his ill-starred newspaper career! Through his own inconceivable blundering, he was caught in a trap from which there was no escape. He could not get a word of his story to the *Sentinel*, and his paper would be scooped clean and clear. Hopson would discharge him for sheer stupidity. He deserved to be discharged, he told himself, in black despair. A good many of his former troubles had been due

without doubt to misfortune, rather than faults of his own, but this affair was spectacular evidence, he conceded, of his utter incompetence. And this was how he had used the best opportunity Hopson had given him—the very best in all the months he had been on the staff of the *Sentinel*—to distinguish himself!

Dent leaned back on the seat again, and closed his eyes. The train was shooting along through the night at a terrific pace. Its rumble and the fast click of the wheels on the rails seemed to mock him: "To Boston, to Boston, to Boston!" Well, he might as well go to Boston as anywhere else—except for his mother and sisters! He remembered, with a choking sensation, the letter of introduction his mother had secured for him just before he applied for work at the *Sentinel*: "This young man has made up his mind to learn the newspaper business [it ran]. He comes of a family that is really distinguished in the world of letters. His maternal grandmother was a writer of renown in her day, and his paternal ancestors had prominent authors among them. This boy desires to follow in their footsteps. If the *Sentinel* can see a way to give him a chance, he will prove his ability."

He smiled bitterly as these words ran through

his brain; he knew them quite well by heart. The letter had been penned by a mutual friend of his family and Hopson's, and Hopson had given him the chance to prove his ability. How had he proved it? His maternal grandmother surely would be very much grieved, and very much ashamed of him, could she come back to witness his humiliating discharge from the *Sentinel*.

But his dead grandmother was not the one who worried him most. Over on the outskirts of Brooklyn, in the quaint old homestead where he was born, were his mother and four sisters. Very proud they were of him; very confident that some day he would be a great writer. Of course this newspaper work was to be only the beginning. Unhappily, the family estate was depleted, and at present there was no hope of college. None of his sisters were old enough to be wage earners, and his father had left them little except the homestead. The boy's salary, meager as it was, helped immensely.

Of course he could get work, at something, he ruminated. If it were merely a matter of dollars, it wouldn't make any great difference. But to fail so ignominiously, at the very beginning of his boasted career, would be a stigma his family could never get over. To himself, no disappoint-

ment—not even his sacrifice of college itself—could be greater.

“To Boston, to Boston, to Boston!” the wheels still seemed to say. He sprang up suddenly and strode after the conductor, whom he overtook in the vestibule of a Pullman. “I haven’t money enough to pay my fare to Providence,” he said, and there was a ring of diabolical pleasure in his voice. “I haven’t much more than enough to get me to New Haven. So, since it’s a violation of the rules to let people ride on the cars for nothing, you’ll have to put me off. You can do it now, if you wish.”

Gladly enough would he quit the train right there in the open country. In some way, he would manage to reach a telegraph office, if he had to hire an automobile.

The conductor examined his lantern with some deliberation, before he answered, and turned up the wick. He seemed exasperatingly deliberate about accepting the challenge.

“The rules,” he said, “provide for such cases. When a passenger gets on the wrong train, or happens to be carried beyond his station, he gets a free transfer back. I’ll give you a punch-slip at Providence that’ll take you back to Bridgeport on the first train in the morning.

That'll be number eighteen. She leaves Providence—"

Dent did groan this time.

"See here!" he exclaimed, "why can't you be a good fellow? You don't know how much this means to me. If I don't get in with my story, I—I'll lose—" He was about to say that he would lose his position, but he checked himself. It was too much like acknowledging his own utter worthlessness. "I'll lose the last edition," he said, instead. "It's only a matter of a minute or two, to stop the train. Why can't you be a good fellow?"

The man laid his hand on Dent's shoulder.

"You're a pretty decent looking young chap," he said, sympathetically, "and if I could do the thing, I would; depend on that. But you've no idea how many folks ask to have trains stopped so they can get off. Why, if we stopped for all of 'em, we'd never get through. The company has laid down an iron rule to the contrary. If I were to let you off to-night at New Haven, or anywhere else west of Providence, I'd have to make a written report; so would the engineer. That would mean—Well, it would mean more trouble for myself than I care about. This is a mail train; we connect with a lot of early trains

and boats out of Boston. She's a hummer, and it's my business to see that she hums. Understand? I'd like to oblige you and the *Sentinel*, but I can't. I simply can't; that's all there is to it."

He turned and walked away, leaving Dent standing there in fresh humiliation and woe.

The boy went back slowly to the day-coach, and resumed his seat. For a minute, the headlong rush of the train slackened, and many lights flashed by. There was a fleeting glimpse of a station, and of people on platforms. Then they were off into the darkness again at the gait of a hurricane. Now New Haven itself was behind them, and the gleaming headlight was devouring the miles that lay between the train and Rhode Island. Rhode Island, indeed! thought Dent. Of all places where he ought not to be on this night, Rhode Island was perhaps the most unexpected.

Had Dent Lockwood been a few years further along in his career, he might have taken the dilemma by the horns and stopped the train himself, as more than one man has done in desperate emergency. By pulling the cord that operated the airbrake, he could have done this, jumped off, and made his escape, doubtless, under

the darkness. But Dent was merely a boy who was not schooled in extreme measures, so he sat there and went along, farther and farther every minute from New York and the *Sentinel*. And every minute he felt his disgrace more keenly. He was not cut out for newspaper work, he told himself, over and over again. He ought to get a job hauling brick.

It had seemed to him that he would never sleep again, but after a time that refrain—ever humming in his ears, "To Boston!"—lulled his chaotic thoughts. He was short of sleep, anyway, for the day previous Hopson had given him a forenoon assignment that had got him out at six in the morning, after four hours of sleep. He had been on duty now for eighteen hours or more. Of course, he had no complaint to make on that score. It was part of the newspaper game, he knew well enough. He wanted to work. If only there was some way to get this Bridgeport story in, how gladly would he work for a week without sleep!

The car was hot and stuffy, and his eyes were shut, anyhow, so after a little he did sleep, in reality. The conductor's hand on his shoulder awoke him.

"Providence!" said the man. "Wake up,

sonny; we're running into Providence now. Here's your punch-slip; it'll take you back to Bridgeport. Sorry, my boy! Next time, look sharper!"

A minute later he stood on the wind-swept platform at Roger Williams' historic town, the chill March air piercing him. He looked at his watch mechanically. It was exactly two forty-two. The night mail was on time. It had done its duty, though he had not.

There was nothing to do but telegraph his mother not to look for him until he arrived. He wrote this message briefly, paid for it, and climbed into a bus just outside. There was no use wiring the *Sentinel*. Had his story been important, he would have sent it in for an extra, but he knew well enough that this Bridgeport yarn was not worth it. The expense of wiring would only add to his offense. There was just one thing he could do, and that was to sleep. For four precious hours he would sleep and forget it. He could ill afford to squander a dollar for a hotel bed, but it seemed as if he really must sleep; that he really must forget. At eight o'clock he would take the train for New York, and then——
Well, whatever might happen to him, the die was cast.

THE THROUGH TRAIN 15

He did sleep—so soundly that except for the persistence of the clerk in arousing him he would have missed the eight o'clock train for New York.

CHAPTER II

THE MAN ON THE INSIDE

HAD Dent missed the eight o'clock train he would have delayed the stirring reception that awaited him in New York and, moreover, he would have failed to make the acquaintance of Mr. Barney McSweeney.

The introduction took place in a parlor-car, even before the train pulled out of Providence. Dent had walked through most of the train without finding a seat, and, unintentionally, found himself in the Pullman. He was not in the habit of luxuriating in cars of this class, and he had no intention of doing so now; so for a moment he stood in uncertainty, debating in his mind the advisability of retracing his steps or going on through the parlor-car in the hope of finding a day-coach beyond. While he stood thus in the narrow aisle near the vestibule a man came along with a rush that came near taking Dent off his feet. It was evident that something rather serious disturbed this excited individual.

"Let me get by!" he shouted, as he found his

way barred by the ample proportions of the cub reporter. "Let me get by! I—I've got to send this telegram—quick, let me pass!"

He was a very large man, weighing perhaps two hundred and fifty, and it was quite impossible for the two to go by each other in the aisle. Ordinarily, he would have been quite jovial in looks. His expansive face was clean-shaven and pleasant, and, despite his fifty years or more, he had only a suspicion of wrinkles. He looked like a man on excellent terms with himself and with the world, while his clothes bore evidence of a good tailor, so far as cut and material were concerned, though they had somewhat sensational effects. The suit was a light-colored plaid in rather loud figure, while the waistcoat belonged to a class wholly its own. It was resplendent with red and green.

Just now, however, the jovial man was not jovial. Indeed, he seemed quite the reverse. In one hand he waved a yellow telegraph blank, and with the other he seized Dent by the arm and pushed him along down the aisle. For a few moments the boy resisted. He was not the sort to take such high-handed measures meekly. Finally bracing himself, he brought the man to a stop.

"Now," said Dent, a little hotly, "I'll let you get by; only give me a chance! Please don't shove me along in that fashion."

Stepping out into the vestibule, he made way for the other, who, with a grunt and a snort, passed him and reached the platform of the car just as the train began to move.

"Hi!" he shouted, flourishing the telegraph blank still more wildly. "Hi! hey! ho! Stop the train! Here's a telegram I've got to send!"

But the train did not stop, and for a second or two the prospect of getting the message off at Providence seemed quite impossible. But Dent, with quick wit, sprang to the man's side, seized the blank, and jumped down the car steps, the vestibuled doors still being open.

He heard the man shouting after him, but there was no time for delays. Down the platform a hundred feet he saw the figure of a red-capped porter, and, sprinting at full speed, he overtook the man.

"Here's a telegram—please file it!" he cried. At the same time he reached into his pocket and found a handful of change; how much there was of it he didn't know, but he was sure the amount was sufficient, not only to pay a reasonable telegraph fee, but to reward the porter, as well.

"File it!" he repeated. "It's important—don't forget it!"

Then, turning as he uttered these instructions, he caught the hand-rail of the observation-car at the rear of the train and swung himself aboard, climbing up over the brass railing to the platform. A minute later he was back in the parlor-car ahead, where the stranger of the telegram received him with exuberance.

"Well, now," he said, as he grasped Dent by the hand with both his huge palms, "you're a boy who'll get along in the world! That was the prettiest thing I've seen done in many a day! Quick as a flash! wasn't it?"

He turned to some of the other passengers for corroboration of his extravagant praise. There were many kindly smiles directed toward Dent and his new acquaintance.

"Where's your seat?" the man went on, still shaking the boy's hand. "What's the number of your chair? Come, I must have a talk with you."

Dent grew very red in the face.

"I—I haven't any chair," he said. "I don't belong in the parlor-car. You see, I was just walking through when I saw you waving that telegraph blank. Oh, it wasn't anything! Don't

thank me any more, sir. It was nothing at all. I knew you wanted the message to go, and I saw that there wasn't a minute to spare; so I just grabbed it and jumped on the platform. I was sure I'd find somebody there to take it to the telegraph window. That's all there was to it. Don't——"

"Oh, there was more to it than that!" insisted the other. "That message, boy, was very important—and I'd clean forgot it until a minute before the train pulled out. There isn't another stop for an hour or two, and the man I wanted to reach would have been gone. Here, now; how much did you give that fellow?"

"I don't know," laughed Dent; "I didn't have time to count the change. I imagine it was about a dollar or so——"

"Then we'll call it five dollars," broke in the stranger. "Here's five——"

"No," said Dent, refusing the bill; "no, that's too much. It couldn't have been over two dollars. Give me two, if you wish. I'm sure that will cover it. No—I don't want any pay for doing a favor."

"Well," the other told him, "you're the right sort of boy, and if I ever get a chance to return this favor—as you put it—you can depend on

me. Don't forget that. Now—— Here, conductor, another seat!" he added, turning to the trainman. "Number six isn't taken, is it? Ah, that'll be fine! Just turn the chair around, please! That's right. Now sit down, boy. Where's your baggage?"

Dent took the chair, facing his companion.

"I haven't any baggage," he said, with a peculiar look in his eyes. "You see, I came up here last night rather—rather unexpectedly, and didn't have time to pack my grip."

Dent laughed, but without much trace of humor. The train was now flying along through the open country, having left Providence behind. For a few minutes Dent had quite forgotten the dilemma he was in, but now his trouble came back to him with redoubled force. He gazed out of the window and was silent.

"Live in New York?" asked the man.

"Yes." Dent did not elaborate.

"Newspaper man, I reckon!" suggested the other.

The boy flushed and turned his astonished eyes on his companion, who laughed good-naturedly.

"I know 'em pretty well," he explained.

"I just happened to notice the copy-paper sticking out of your coat pocket when you jumped

off the train with my message." He winked at Dent in a jolly sort of way.

The youth's face relaxed gradually into a look of comprehension. Still, no ordinary man, he reflected, would exhibit such extraordinary sagacity.

"Yes," he acknowledged, "I'm a newspaper man—at least, I'm beginning to be one. Are you a newspaper man yourself? If you're not, you must be a detective!"

The big fellow enjoyed the situation immensely.

"No," he chuckled, "I'm neither. My name"—he got a card from his coat pocket and presented it to the boy—"is Barney McSweeney. Perhaps you may have heard of me."

Dent took the card and scanned it.

"Yes," he said, quickly, "I have heard of you often. And I'm very glad to know you, Mr. McSweeney. I haven't a doubt that I'll have a chance to meet you sometime again. I certainly hope so."

His new friend reached over and put a brawny, puffy hand on his shoulder.

"I hope so, too," he said. "I won't forget you; depend on that! If I can ever do anything for you, don't hesitate about coming to me."

And then once more he winked at Dent

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from beneath an overhanging eyebrow. It was a wink full of kindness and self-confidence.

"You know," he added, "that in some things I'm 'on the inside.'"

CHAPTER III

THE FINAL TEST

“**L**OCKWOOD! O Lockwood!”

The authoritative voice of Hopson always caused a momentary lull in the clatter of typewriters, and now for a moment the city room was still. From one of the typewriter-desks at the far end, Dent arose instantly. Crossing the room on a half run, he stood before the city editor's desk, awaiting long-delayed orders. It was now 10:22 in the evening. Since one o'clock in the afternoon, Dent had sat at his desk with nothing to do. For more than nine hours—excepting the twenty minutes he had taken for supper at a lunch-counter down on Nassau Street—he had waited there in a torture of uncertainty. He did not know whether he still belonged to the *Sentinel* staff or not. A hundred times he had wished the thing over with. Hopson might at least have the goodness to discharge him, he thought, and not keep him sitting there in disgrace all day, an object of commiseration and ridicule for the whole local room.

True, Hopson had made his intentions tolerably clear. When Dent had reported for duty that day, and related to the city editor's unsympathetic ears the story of his journey to Providence, things had been said that left little doubt of the ultimate outcome. Hopson had a marvelous vocabulary, and a sarcasm—when he chose to use it—as biting as the north wind in winter. On this occasion he did choose to use it, and all the staff heard. Whether or not it was wholly just, it was wretchedly humiliating, and the boy's proud spirit had almost rebelled. He had come near turning his back squarely on Hopson and walking out of the *Sentinel* office forever. Only one thing prevented—the bitter thought of going home to his mother and sisters, a failure.

So Hopson had finally sent him back to his desk without rendering a final verdict. This suspense, no doubt, was part of his punishment. Perhaps, he thought, he would have to sit there until payday, when he would get one of the dreaded blue slips in his envelope, with the polite but chilling message: "The *Sentinel* regrets that your services are no longer required." Dent had seen many of these slips since he came to the newspaper. Every payday he had opened

his envelope with fear and trembling. But even a blue slip would be preferable, he reflected, as he awaited the turn of events, to this contemptuous silence on Hopson's part. Every man of the staff was given an assignment—every man but himself! *He* was ignored; he did not count in the scheme of things.

But at last Hopson had called, "O Lockwood!" in that gruff, peremptory tone of his, as if there were no question at all about being obeyed. Nearly all the men were back from their evening assignments, and every eye in the room was focused on his back as he stood before the huge roller-top desk of the city room's despot.

This desk stood at one end of the great, oblong apartment, with no partition or railing to mark it as the throne of an autocrat. To the left extended a long table, capable of seating half a dozen copy-readers, or copy-editors, as they preferred to call themselves. To the right stood the desk of Tompkins, the night city editor, who was even more tyrannical than his chief, without the other's picturesque redeeming features. In front was the major part of the city room itself; a bare reach of floor-space it was, broken by four double rows of typewriter-desks, back to back, each lighted by its green-

shaded bulb on a long metal arm. There was nothing superfluous in the city room, not even waste-baskets. The floor answered well enough for the litter of crumpled copy-paper. A score or more of reporters were just at the moment intent on learning what Hopson had to say to the cub.

Hopson himself was a man of strong character; his face and atmosphere gave evidence of that. He was rather short, but weighed two hundred. He was smooth-shaven and bald as a plate; his nose was large and inclined to be hooked; his cheek-bones high; his lips were full but firm; his jaw square. His native disposition was genial, and he gave flashes of wit and good-fellowship; but the machine he was driving left him small opportunity for this sort of thing. A relentless, crowding, pitiless machine it was, with every cog to be kept at top-notch efficiency. From his desk radiated a maze of invisible wires extending to every corner of the metropolis and country adjacent. It was his business to keep all these wires working. Whenever one of them failed, as it had in Dent's case, there was trouble for Hopson, as well as for the staff under him. On the sixteenth floor was the office of the managing editor, and, adjoining it, the sanctum of the

editor-in-chief, or owner of the *Sentinel*. These two potentates kept the pressure on Hopson, just as he kept it on the city room.

"Lockwood," Hopson now said, as the boy stood at attention in the midst of these settings, "I want you to get down to Liberty Street in a hurry and catch the ten-thirty ferry. You've got eight minutes." Hopson held his watch in his hand. It was a blackened and battered old timepiece, presumably silver, but, like Hopson himself, it presented its worst side to the public gaze. Every reporter on the *Sentinel* knew that Hopson's watch told the exact truth, down to the fraction of a second. "Eight minutes!" he repeated, closing the disreputable case with a suggestive snap and dropping it into his vest pocket. "If you make the ten-thirty ferry you can catch the last Jersey Central train to East Fork. There's a little story down there I want you to cover. I can use half a column or more."

As he spoke, he handed Dent a slip of paper bearing two typewritten lines: "East Fork, N. J.—Janet Harrison, missing for five hours today, was recovered by bloodhounds, unharmed." That was all.

"Don't stop to read it now," warned Hopson, in quick disapproval, as the boy glanced at it.

"Hurry, now, and get back here on the train that leaves East Fork about midnight. You can be in the office by one-thirty. Now let me see what you can do."

Hopson's tone was astonishingly mild, but a second later, as Dent seemed to hesitate, he asked, somewhat irascibly:

"Well, what's the matter?"

"I shall need an expense order, sir." There was an apologetic accent in the boy's tone, and the color flamed in his face. "I—I'm sorry, Mr. Hopson——"

The other cut him off rather sharply.

"Why don't you carry a few dollars in your pockets?" he asked. "With the ferry-boat a mile away, and less than eight minutes in which to catch it, how do you expect to get an expense order through. Here—take this! Now get out and leg it!"

Hopson reached into his pocket as he spoke and extracted a roll of bills, passing one to the boy.

Dent crumpled the money in his hand and turned away. Running lightly to his desk he seized his hat and some copy-paper. Without delaying even to get his overcoat from its peg near-by, he continued his hurried exit between the rows of typewriter-desks. A chorus of shouts

followed him as he shot through the door of the city room and disappeared into the corridor. "Ask the conductor which train it is!" "East Fork lies westward!" "Get your stuff in by day after to-morrow!" These were some of the good-humored admonitions. On the *Sentinel*, these little flings were considered part of a cub's training, though not all of the men in the city room now voiced their thoughts. Some of them glanced at their watches and looked at each other significantly. It was clear enough to them that Hopson had given this unfortunate lad an impossible "stunt." The cub was doomed.

But Dent went along, scarcely hearing the shouts, nor caring whether they were friendly or otherwise. He knew well enough that the crisis had really come in his newspaper career. He knew that Hopson had kept him waiting all day for a chance of this sort. It was the final test.

The elevator shot him down very swiftly, though the descent seemed endless. Fast as the drop was in reality, it gave him time to think. Yes, this was merely a crafty way of finishing him off, he reflected. Hopson knew very well that he could not possibly make the ten-thirty boat, even if a taxicab should be waiting at the

door to be picked up on the instant. By the time he got down to Park Row he wouldn't have more than six minutes left, and how could he reach the Liberty Street ferry in that time? To be sure, it was evening, and lower New York was comparatively empty; yet there would be street-cars and mail wagons and express vans in the way, and no doubt more than one automobile. There were a lot of policemen, too, on the watch for racing taxicabs. No, the thing couldn't be done. It was all a trick Hopson was playing on him! Hopson's mildness in giving the assignment had puzzled him for the moment, but now he understood it. He was slated for slaughter, and he might as well take it.

During the few seconds that elapsed before the elevator stopped at the bottom, all Dent's long string of misfortunes passed through his brain. During the last month, especially, everything had gone wrong. True, he had not been given any work that mattered a great deal, but even on these humble tasks he had failed or blundered. In his heart, he felt that many of his troubles had come from want of instruction. The *Sentinel* cubs were expected to know just how to do things without being told. But of course that didn't account for this Bridgeport travesty, nor the

sad mistake of the Orcutt obituary, in which he had given a wrong date for the obsequies. Nor did it excuse him when he spelled a name wrong in a society item, and brought down a great deal of wrath on the *Sentinel*. It might have accounted in part for his getting scooped on a Night Court story Hopson had sent him to cover, but it could not, by any twist of logic, be offered in palliation of his unspeakable blunder in transposing the names in a police story, so that the wrong man was made out the criminal. He wasn't satisfied, however, that this mistake was really his own, though he took the blame for it. One of the copy-readers had butchered this yarn—wasn't it possible that *he* had done it?

But now the situation was perfectly clear: get this East Fork story, or quit! Why not quit now, and done with it? That was what Hopson wanted him to do. Anybody with any sense at all would know that he *must* quit.

A moment later he was in the great *Sentinel* lobby. There had always been something inspiring about that high, vaulted room. Its lines were so sweeping, so majestic, that the boy had been awed the first time he entered it. It reminded him of a cathedral. A fitting entrance-way it was for the mighty newspaper housed

within those towering walls. Now it was brilliant with electricity, and the glare fell on the mosaic floor that sparkled like gems.

With a sudden resolution gripping him, the boy crossed the rotunda and passed out into Park Row. No, he would not quit; he would fight to the last ditch before he quit. The whole world was in a conspiracy against him, but he would fight the whole world. He faced defeat, but he would not deign to notice it. There was no legitimate reason, he told himself, why he should pass down and out of the *Sentinel* in this fashion. Inherently, he was just as capable as any of the fellows up there—even Gilicuddy, the brilliant and daring star whom Hopson revered! Yes—Dent's teeth were clenched as he thought of it—he could do as well as Gilicuddy if he had the chance and the training. There was only one thing to do—make the chance and get the training!

The street was dazzling with light. Up and down this historic newspaper thoroughfare rose immense skyscraping structures that lost themselves far up in the night. Across the way lay City Hall Park, deserted beneath its bare trees. Spring had not yet touched them. Here, when New York was very different, George Washington

and the American Army had listened to the reading of the Declaration of Independence. A little of his history flashed through his brain as he stood for a single second on the granite steps of the Sentinel Building. Those were valiant days in the metropolis—days when men refused to be vanquished. New York might have changed, but men had not.

Another second he paused and looked up and down Newspaper Row for a taxicab. Unfortunate it was that the Jersey Central station, on the west bank of the Hudson, was not accessible by tunnel train. Could he have swooped under the river in one of the tubes, he might have caught the East Fork train easily. But Hopson knew as well as he that the slow-moving ferry was his only means of getting across the river. And not a cab was in sight.

CHAPTER IV

FOR THE TEN-THIRTY BOAT

UP toward Chambers Street a lumbering auto-truck, heavily laden with merchandise, was chugging noisily; just below, at the postoffice, many mail-wagons were backed up at the platforms; across the park, on Broadway, he saw a slow-moving street-car. The truck and mail wagons could be of no use to him, and the street-car was going in the wrong direction. He was not sure, anyhow, that it could have helped him much, even had it been headed toward the Battery. A delivery-wagon might have been of service, could he have found one on the moment, but no small vehicle was available.

He pulled out his dollar watch and glanced at it. Ordinarily, he could not depend on its reckonings, but only a few minutes previously he had set it by the city room clock. This was kept on the dot by electricity, and Dent now knew that 10:24 was just the right time.

There was no way to get to Liberty Street but

to run for it. Without wasting another second, the boy started out on his race against losing odds. In his high-school days he had distinguished himself as a runner. Cross-country sprints had been his specialty; he had never been good at short spurts. Out on Long Island, where all his life had been spent, he had once held the record for his school. He had done two and a half miles in twelve minutes and fifty-nine seconds, and one mile in four and one-half minutes.

But now he was wholly out of training. It had been nine months since he was graduated from high-school, and the only running he had done since then had been for the *Sentinel*. There had been enough of that, true, but it was not the sort of running that really counted for wind and staying qualities. Besides, running across country was different from racing down city streets and dodging pedestrians and vehicles. Then, too, a drizzling rain was falling, and the sidewalks were treacherous.

However, his salvation lay in his legs, and nowhere else. Down Park Row he ran, as he had never run in his life. Past the statues of Horace Greeley and Benjamin Franklin he went, vaguely remembering that they were news-

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paper men, too—men who succeeded after much tribulation. Down past the postoffice he flew, the long bluish lights on the ceilings inside blinding him for a moment as he looked at them. On the pavements the arc lights made circles and showed the misty rain in the air.

At Ann Street, just beyond the Government structure, he came into Broadway. In its lower extremity, this mighty artery of the metropolis was almost deserted. He would not have boarded a car, had there been one at hand; he was confident he could go faster afoot. Cars had to stop for people, and he did not. Cars could not get around obstructions; he could.

However, he gave a despairing glance up and down for a taxicab, but none was in sight. Ordinarily, he saw them everywhere. There was nothing in sight now except the gloomy cañon of the street and a great four-horse truck laden with milk, bound uptown.

With head down, shoulders forward, and every nerve strained to the task, he hurtled along on the east side of Broadway, past the dark shops and cavernous portals of office skyscrapers. Once, at Fulton Street, he had to check his headlong rush for a street-cleaning machine that crossed just ahead of him. At John Street he

turned out to let two men go by with satchels, and, as he shot past, somebody shouted behind him:

"Stop thief! Stop him!"

He had just been thinking of Hopson; of the thoughtless question the city editor had asked: "Why don't you carry a few dollars in your pocket?" Why, indeed? Bitterness had been in the boy's heart toward his chief. Hopson ought to have known where his money went. Little enough it was at best. But now his resentment shifted instantly upon that unknown defamer behind him. Well, he had withstood many things since he faced the world for a living. He could stand being called a thief, but let them try to stop him if they dared!

"Stop thief! Stop him!" The cry was far in the rear now; he was at Maiden Lane. But just then, a block further on, he caught the glint of electricity on a policeman's badge.

For the fraction of a second, Dent checked his speed again; then he let himself out once more. Not even a policeman should stop him! It was no violation of the law to run for a ferry-boat. He was bent on an honest enterprise, even if a desperate one. He was undertaking an impossible feat, but it had no taint of dis-

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honor. Indeed, was it not almost heroic? What right, he asked himself, as he put all his waning strength to the task, did anybody have to stop him?

The bluecoat had been standing in the middle of Broadway, watching him, but now, as the "Stop thief!" rang out down the silent thoroughfare, the ponderous giant gathered his slow impulses and ran toward the east curb to head off the flying figure. This was just what Dent had calculated the officer would do. And after all—the thought came to him in a flash—the man was only performing his duty. He was there to stop thieves, and who else but a thief would run like that in New York? The policeman was all right—but that did not alter the fact that he must catch the ten-thirty boat.

Dent planned his ruse well—planned it with the quickness of desperation. Squarely into the bluecoat's arms the boy seemed to be running, and the guardian of the law stopped and braced himself for the shock.

There wasn't any shock. The man's heavy motions aided the boy's strategy. Quick as lightning itself, Dent swerved to the left, as if to pass between the policeman and the brick walls of Broadway. Then, as the patrolman

swerved, too, Dent dodged to the right. He slipped on the wet walk and went down on one knee, but he was up before the other could regain his equilibrium.

Then he was off again, like the wind, cutting diagonally across to the other side of the street. He knew that he had not more than three minutes between himself and disgrace, and how could he stop to explain that he was merely catching a ferry-boat? Besides, it was certain his explanation would have to be made at a police station, and he resolved this should never be.

Glancing back over his shoulder as he reached Cortlandt Street, he saw the policeman sprawling flat on the asphalt pavement where he had taken a header in the pursuit. He was sorry, but it couldn't be helped. At any rate, it gave him more of a chance. With an astonishing spurt, he swung into Cortlandt Street like a hurricane. He heard the officer shout, and a moment later he barely escaped a collision with a group of pedestrians coming up. To avoid a fall, he leaped squarely over a suitcase one of them carried.

Cutting across the road to the south sidewalk, he kept on at the same headlong speed. Now there were more people in the way, for his course

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was lined with restaurants, fruit-stands, and cigar stores that kept late hours. In the distance he could see the lights of the Cortlandt Street ferry, and his own pier was just a block below.

Once more skirting a party of belated commuters, he took to the middle of the road, and put every breath, every nerve, into the finish. There was no time to consult his watch, but he was hopeful. Certainly, he had made a wonderful run. If *trying* would accomplish a thing, he must succeed. And yet, he thought, with a sudden despair, he had *tried* up at Bridgeport the night before. It was because he had really tried so hard to catch the train for New York that he had mistaken the platforms and gone to Providence.

West Street, bordering the wharves, looked lonely enough, congested though it had been in the daytime with its ever-pressing currents of freight traffic. Dent had often seen its broad roadway in an apparently hopeless blockade of vans and motor-trucks. Now, however, only a few lonesome express wagons were in sight, with a hansom-cab in the distance. Dent needed no cab now; he was at the very entrance to the Liberty Street ferry.

Wavering and faltering from exhaustion, his breath all but gone, and his heart fairly bursting, he went through the doors and headed for the ticket-window as if he meant to demolish it. Finding a coin, at the cost of a second or two, he tossed it in, abandoned his change, and bolted for the railed passage-way that led into the waiting-room.

Clang, clang! It was the signal for the closing of the gates to the bridge; the ten-thirty gong.

Dent flung his ticket in the face of the astonished "chopper," and sprang through the room, but the next moment he stood in breathless despair, for the iron grating was shut in his face. Out beyond, he heard the rattle of chains. He understood the signs only too well.

Dent knew the futility of clamoring for admission. He had seen the attempt made very often, and never once had he seen it successful. The autocrats of the ferry were immutable, once the gates were drawn. If life lay on one side, and death on the other, the argument would never alter the course of those dogged guardians. They were supreme.

Neither was there any chance to climb over, for the sagacious designers had built the gates to connect with the ceiling. There was no way to

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get under, for they came to the floor. Dent knew all this.

But the boy, thanks to his habit of observation, knew one thing more about this ferry-house. He knew there was a window that opened upon the bridge from the janitor's store-room, just off the waiting-room. Once he had seen the janitor climbing through this window. It was not more than six feet above the bridge level.

Without wasting even a second in useless demands at the gate, the boy turned and made for the store-room. To reach it was a feat of four or five seconds. To get through the store-room itself took him not more than two seconds, though in doing so he kicked over a bucket of water, tripped up the startled janitor, stepped on a cat, and rammed himself with a mop-handle.

The window was open. In this, at least, fortune favored him. With a single leap, he was on the sill. Swinging his feet through, he plunged to the bridge, going down on all fours.

From the window, the janitor was shouting at him; somebody else, from the boat, took up the cry. The bridge-men, just casting off the hawsers, uttered exclamations in a foreign tongue. He gave no heed to any one, but, scrambling to his feet, dashed out to the end of the bridge and

leaped a four-foot chasm over white, seething water. He alighted safely, but quite limp and helpless, on the team-deck. Somebody seized him by the shoulders and dragged him away from the unguarded edge.

CHAPTER V

GETTING THE STORY IN

AT midnight, Dent stood on the dark platform at the East Fork station, thirty miles from New York. A mighty triumph was swelling in his heart, for all the facts of his story were jotted down on his copy-paper, securely stored away in the inside pocket of his coat. In five minutes the eastward-bound train was due.

It had not been a difficult story to get, and his half-hour between trains had proved ample. The village was very small, and the people he had come down to see were still astir. Gladly enough they told him all he wanted to know. The child had been lost that day in the woods; blood-hounds had been put on the trail. The child was found. That was all there was to it. A simple little feature-story it was, good for half a column, as Hopson had said. But to Dent, as he stood peering down the black right-of-way, it was a story of immense import. The facts of

the tale itself were not important. The great thing was this: *he had made good.*

Standing under the single kerosene lamp on the platform, he took from his pocket the typewritten slip Hopson had given him. He smiled as he glanced through the message again, and then crumpled it up and tossed it away. It was of no use any longer. He had the full story. Furthermore, he would have a whole hour on the train, and when he got back to the *Sentinel* office he would hand in his copy, completed. Ah! this night would be a triumphant one, indeed! He would have to wake up his mother and tell her about it before he could sleep. What a fine joke he had on Hopson! Well, it only showed what a little grit would do, he reflected. A fellow could do a great deal in eight minutes if he really set about it. Hopson could not discharge him now. His position was safe—for a while!

But why didn't the eastbound train come along? he wondered. Still gazing down the dark track, he saw only red and white switch-lights. East Fork was scarcely more than a cross-roads, and there was not even a telegraph station. The dingy little depot was as black as night itself, and locked. The wailing March wind was any-

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thing but comfortable as the boy waited outside, without overcoat or gloves.

Impatiently, he paced the planks. There was no way to tell how late the train might be, and, when half an hour had slipped by, his anxiety goaded him to action. All his exultation was gone.

Across the road from the station was a house. With quick decision, he went up the steps and knocked loudly.

"Please tell me where there's a telephone handy!" he said, when an upper window was opened. "It—it's very important, you know."

"Four blocks down the street, on your right." The answer was given in a man's grudging voice. Then the sash was let down with a bang.

Four blocks from the station! Dent stood at the gate in hesitation. If he were to go so far from the depot, most likely the train would come during his absence, and leave him there at East Fork. Of course, were he sure of finding a 'phone, the inconvenience to himself would not matter. To get that story in, he would gladly walk these lonely streets until morning. But suppose he should not get a 'phone? There could be few telephones, at best, in this village. Suppose he

should be denied the use of one! Often had he heard the *Sentinel* men tell of such things.

He made his decision quickly. It never would do to stand idly on the platform and let the night slip away. At the risk of losing the train he must hunt up a telephone. But before he had gone a block he stopped suddenly and retraced his steps on the run, for the long-drawn blast of a locomotive startled him.

To his disappointment, however, he saw the headlight coming from the east, instead of the west. Then a heavy freight-train drew slowly in, and the engine stood panting at the water-tank. A very cheerful sight it was, shrouded in steam, with a halo of fire over it. For the moment, Dent really envied the engine-crew. They could sit up there in the cab and not worry over Hopson. They could ride along through the night in their steel monster, and not bother their heads over last editions.

Then, running up along the track, the boy called to the engineer:

"Have you heard anything from the east-bound train? Do you know how late she is?"

"Don't know," returned the engine man, rather short in his speech. He was down on the ground with his flaring torch and oil-can.

"I'm not worrying about number six; I've got the westbound track, and that's all I want."

For a minute, Dent stood silent. In his heart he wished himself a millionaire for an hour, so that he might hire the locomotive to rush him to Jersey City. Great sport it would be to go tearing through the night in that fashion.

But this was no time for idle dreaming.

"How far is it to Bound Brook?" he asked, as a sudden idea flashed over him.

"Five miles," returned the other, reaching far in between his huge driving-wheels with his long-nosed oil-can. "The last passenger train went down an hour ago. If you're going that way, you ought to've caught number five."

"Isn't this train going that way?" Dent asked, apprehensively.

"You can't ride on it, if it is," retorted the other. The tank was overflowing now, and the engineer swung himself on to his high-reaching steps. "We don't carry passengers."

"I'm a New York *Sentinel* man," said Dent, with some importance. "I've got to get a wire mighty quick. If you'll let me ride in the engine——"

A mighty hissing of steam drowned his words.

The ponderous machine shuddered and moved, and, a moment later, the wheels slid around amid a furious puffing from the smokestack. Then the steel rims got a grip, and the whole tremendous mass of the train was under way.

"If you'll let me ride to Bound Brook——" Dent had caught the hand-rail of the locomotive and now stood on the lower step, looking up anxiously; his face was bathed in the fiery glow from the furnace, just thrown open by the fireman. But he did not finish his appeal, for the engineer, leaning far down out of his cab, cut him short.

"Get off that step!" he commanded, in a tone that left no doubt as to his meaning. "You can't ride, I tell you. It's against the rules, and I'd be laid off thirty days without pay if I took you. Get off, or I'll put you off!"

Dent let go and dropped back on to the cinders. To persist would be the sheerest folly. In a moment the engine had passed him, and, one by one, the shadowy freight-cars were gliding by. Each came along with a greater impetus as the marvelous iron horse ahead got down to work.

The boy's thoughts flew very fast. One thing was certain: in some manner, that blood-

hound story must get to the *Sentinel*. The choice now lay between finding a telephone here at East Fork, or putting the story on the wire at Bound Brook. At the latter place there was a night operator; Dent was sure.

It took him not more than half a minute to make the decision, but during those thirty seconds the freight train had gained a dangerous momentum. To board it, in the dark, and with its handle-bars slippery from rain, would be a feat even more hazardous than his running-jump from the bridge to the ferry-boat. But no matter; hazardous things had to be done when the stakes were as big as they were this night.

Squinting along the cars, in line with the dim station light a little way off, Dent could catch the glint on the iron bars as they approached. At the right moment, he reached up and seized one. The jerk seemed to tear his very shoulders apart, and he felt his coat rip up the back. Clinging desperately, with his legs dangling and swaying, he was carried along. Something rapped him sharply across the calves, and for a second a red light flashed as he turned his head. Then, hand over hand, he pulled himself up on the bar and felt for the footrest with his feet. He found it at last, and stood panting there,

oppressed with a sickening sense of the danger he had come through. Had he been an inch or two farther out, the iron frame of the switch-light might have dragged him down under the wheels.

But presently he smiled, and found an easier hold. At any rate, he was all right now. Funny it was, he reflected, that on the night previous he should be denied the right to get off a train, and now denied the right to get on. Well, the score was being evened, so no fault could be found by any one. He was stealing a ride, but he was willing enough to pay for it. Now that he thought of it, he *would* pay. It would be fun to drop a dime into an envelope and mail it to the railroad company. Surely, a dime would cover the fare, considering the fact that his accommodations were not exactly first-class.

The freight-train rattled noisily on, but its racket was music in Dent's ears. The cinders beat upon his head and shoulders, and he had to keep his eyes shut. He remained down between the cars, and the gale that struck him seemed to come from all directions at once. It was bitterly cold, too, without his overcoat, and had the journey been a long one he would have despaired. But he was happy, nevertheless. Surely, he

reflected, as he swayed and bumped with the train, he would get a blue circle for this!

At the *Sentinel* office a blue circle was the highest mark Hopson could give a member of his staff.

Hopson's system of markings was simple and direct. Near his desk sat an assistant whose business it was every day to read all the New York newspapers, compare the principal news-stories and feature-stories, and then take his big shears and clip out those of chief importance in the day's grist. A "beat" scored by the *Sentinel* he indicated by a vertical blue-pencil mark on the clipping. A "beat" secured by another newspaper against the *Sentinel* was shown by a vertical mark in red pencil.

Hopson then took the clippings and marked them himself. If he wished to give unstinted praise to a piece of work in the *Sentinel* he made his much-coveted blue circle on the clipping. If he wished to praise in the highest degree the work of a reporter on a rival newspaper, he did so by means of a red circle.

Likewise, a horizontal mark, in blue or red, indicated "Poor Story." A series of diagonal dashes stood for "Rotten," while a wavering line meant "The Worst Ever Perpetrated."

These clippings were distributed among the members of the staff, each man getting the blue-marked *Sentinel* ones for which he stood responsible, as well as the red-marked rival clippings that pertained to him. Some of the fellows got plenty of blue circles in their favor and very few red marks against them. Dent, on the other hand, had never received a blue circle, while the red "beat" marks charged to him had been of common occurrence. Sometimes he received horizontal blue marks, but more often he got diagonal dashes and wavering lines. He felt sure that these were not always just, but arose from the fact that he was merely a cub. It was not fair to compare his work with Gilicuddy's or Waterman's or Oppenheim's. Naturally enough, he could make only a poor showing beside these three brilliant performers. But he knew that Hopson's standard was gaged up to Gilicuddy's capabilities, so that the work of the younger men made a very poor showing. Hopson, perhaps, meant to be just.

However, Dent's teeth clenched sharply as he thought of Tompkins. Sometimes, when Hopson was busy or absent, Tompkins, as the next ranking officer of the *Sentinel's* little army, marked the clippings. He hated all cubs on general

principles. Not often had he failed to mark one of Dent's clippings with anything but a wavering line. Tompkins was not "on the square," the fellows all said. Nobody disputed his ability as a newspaper man, but scarcely a member of the staff trusted him. He was just naturally mean; "sour on himself," as Hollender remarked. Hollender had been the cub before Dent succeeded him. One cub at a time was all Hopson would stand. It had taken Hollender a year and a half to be graduated into a full-fledged reporter. How long it would take Dent, was problematical. Indeed, it had seemed problematical whether he would ever be graduated at all. Certainly he would not if Tompkins had anything to say.

At any rate, Dent reflected, even Tompkins could not give him a zigzag line on the morrow. Of course, he would have to take pains in writing the story, but already he had it mapped out in his head. It would be an easy story to write, and he knew he could do it tolerably well. He would start out by saying——

Just then he felt the freight slackening its speed. Cautiously poking his head out, the boy saw the switch-lights of a town. He was at his destination already.

But, to his astonishment, the freight suddenly lurched forward again. Light after light flashed by, then low-lying freight sheds, then the station itself. The train was going through Bound Brook without stopping!

Dent hung out and prepared to drop, keeping a sharp watch, nevertheless, for obstructions. The moon was obscured by clouds, but there was light enough to see that a stretch of marshy land lay ahead. Every moment the train was gaining speed, and he must act, and act quickly. Just then the glow from the fire-box lighted the heavens and showed him, distinctly, just the spot for the leap.

Stretching as far down as he could, he let go, and went flying head over heels down the embankment. Into the marsh he was flung, and the icy water crept into his neck and his shoes. He saved himself from going in all over by clutching the reeds at the edge, cutting his hands.

But no matter! He was all right, and he crawled forth and limped away down the track to Bound Brook. He was very stiff and lame now, from his run and exposure on the freight-train, and his hands were bleeding; but he did not care. He got out his watch under a switch, and found the time to be 12:55. It was still early, from a

newspaper standpoint, and once more he exulted. It would be easy to prove that the eastbound train had been late, should Hopson question it. Now for the story!

He wrote it on the little table of the night operator, in the Bound Brook depot, leaving each page smeared with red as he moved his pencil to and fro. The blood, however, exhilarated him. He was sorry he could not take the copy home as a trophy.

When it was finished, Dent sat back in relief and listened to the mysterious ticking of the instrument as the story went over the wire to the *Sentinel*. Very proud the boy was of his work on this night—not only proud of getting the story, but quite as proud of the actual writing. In his inner judgment, he knew he had written it well. A pretty, sentimental little story it was, and even Tompkins could not fail to acknowledge it. At last, Dent assured himself, he was getting into the game.

The clicking ceased.

"All in," said the operator, making a few abbreviations on the copy itself and sticking it on to a spindle. "All in and O. K. Now, if I were you, I'd hustle along to bed. You can't get out of here before six nineteen in the

morning; it's just one fifty-two now. You'll find a hotel——"

"The depot will suit me all right," said Dent, with a smile. "It's warm and cozy enough for anybody. If you don't object, I'll curl up out there on a bench, and you can call me in time for the train."

CHAPTER VI

TOMPKINS

THE first thing Dent did when he alighted from the train at Jersey City the next morning was to invest in a copy of the *Sentinel*, for only the mail edition had reached Bound Brook when he left that town at daybreak. There was no hurry about getting over to New York, so he concluded to wait for another ferry-boat; while he sat in the waiting-room he would feast his eyes on the story he had sent in so triumphantly. He half expected to see it on the first page, though he confessed to himself, as he unfolded the newspaper, that this was too much to hope for. Still, he had seen news-stories on the front page that were by no means as good as this.

Rapidly, his eyes scanned the big heads on the outside. The leading article was a political story about some fusion plan of the Republicans. It did not interest Dent; he understood politics imperfectly as yet, though he was making an effort to master its dry, tedious routine. Ordinarily, he read the political news carefully, be-

cause it was part of his necessary training; but now he skipped this column promptly.

The second head related to the foreign war situation, and the story was made up chiefly of interviews secured in New York from Europeans who had disembarked from the day's steamships. This was a class of work Dent had not yet undertaken. A successful interviewer, he knew, must possess not only great tact and diplomacy, but an intimate knowledge of current events; the boy realized how much he had to learn. But this foreign story had nothing to hold him just now.

The third big story was an account of a Fifth Avenue runaway accident. Even this was beyond his present ability to handle; neither had he any immediate purpose of reading it.

A Wall Street article completed the complement of big-head stories, and this touched a field that was wholly mysterious and unexplored, so far as Dent was concerned. Indeed, it seemed to him, as his glance roved over this first page of the *Sentinel*, that he had learned very little indeed during the months he had spent in the city room. He resolved that in some way he must get out of the infant class and learn to do things that counted. New York was a vast and complicated puzzle to solve, but a fellow

must untangle it, thread by thread, if he wanted to get on in newspaper work. Yes, he must reach out beyond New York; he must make the whole country, the whole world, his workshop. Like Gilicuddy and Waterman and Oppenheim, and some of the other high-up men of the staff, he must store away in his brain a marvelous fund of knowledge; he must know people as a chess-player knows his pieces.

With some disappointment, he looked over the lesser stories on the front page without finding his own. Then, with fingers that trembled a little, he turned it over. The second page contained another foreign article, a big head on pure food, a number of minor telegraph stories, and some advertisements. The third page was largely taken up with pictures and advertising matter.

With a queer feeling creeping over him, Dent turned the pages again. The fourth and fifth were devoted chiefly to New York city news. There were three or four telegraph dispatches, and the boy's heart almost stood still when his eyes caught the date line of one: "East——" No, it was "East Farnham," instead of "East Fork."

Then came the editorial page, and he knew

there was no use looking on that. Besides, the profound editorials always depressed him, although in the office he made it a solemn duty to wade through every line. They made him feel the vast gap that lay between him and the men who filled this page every day. There was a mighty awe in Dent's heart whenever he passed the open door of the editorial writers' room and glanced inside at these brilliant, erudite gentlemen. It seemed to him that they had corralled everything in newspaperdom worth corraling.

But what had happened to his bloodhound story? In something of a panic, he ran through the remaining pages of the *Sentinel*. There was society and literature and the drama—all of which only emphasized his primitive knowledge of the calling he was embarked upon. For a moment, the sporting page cheered him; here, at least, he was tolerably at home. But beyond that lay stocks and bonds, and of these he was utterly, ruinously ignorant. And then came more advertisements; his search was ended.

He let the paper drop, with a groan he could not stifle. In a minute he picked it up and went through it again, with infinite pains. The East Fork story was not there.

Dent arose, kicking the paper savagely as it

lay on the floor. He wanted no more of it; not a single line would he read—not if he never learned the newspaper business as long as he lived. An ungrateful, unfeeling business it was! For a minute he wished himself in China or India, or anywhere, so long as he got away from it. All his work gone for nothing! All his super-human effort absolutely unrecognized! He had fairly moved heaven and earth to accomplish the thing, and now not one solitary line to show for it! Up at Bridgeport he had blundered, and Hopson had mercilessly and publicly grilled him. On this East Fork story he had done the reverse, and now Hopson—— Well, what would Hopson say, indeed?

Dent knew that in all probability the city editor had gone home before the East Fork dispatch came in. Tompkins, no doubt, had been in charge of the city room. Technically, the story belonged to the telegraph side, but when telegraph stories were handled by men from the city room it was the custom to turn the dispatches over to Hopson or Tompkins to edit. It was Tompkins, evidently, who had side-tracked Dent's story. The boy indulged in these resentful reflections as the ferry-boat took him across the Hudson and landed him at Liberty Street.

Very different did New York seem now. Its roar smote Dent's ears the moment he set foot on the wharf. West Street was filled with heavy vehicles, and up Cortlandt Street to Broadway moved an army of New Jersey commuters that filled the sidewalks and encroached on the roadway. The early crush was on—the vast, unwieldy, steadily-moving crush of humanity that seeks the metropolis's centers daily after breakfast, and leaves them at evening. Dent moved along with the throng, retracing the course he had come over the night before so swiftly. Broadway was now almost impassable; street-cars, automobiles, wagons, all vied with each other for the right-of-way, and policemen with shrill whistles—and sometimes with explosive words—maintained the equilibrium between pedestrians and wheels.

Of all this, Dent saw very little; his brain was intent on his own affairs. A reaction had set in against the despair he had felt on the ferry. He *would* succeed in his calling, no matter how many knocks he got. He *must* succeed. His life lay before him; New York held marvelous possibilities. It would never do to give way at the very beginning. From now on, he would set about mastering his work in earnest.

He new there would be nobody in the *Sentinel* editorial rooms except the janitors, but he went up, nevertheless. The building had thousands of tenants aside from the newspaper staff, and although it was yet early, the "express" elevator in which he ascended was well filled. Looking over the shoulder of one of the passengers as the latter snatched a minute to read his *World*, Dent saw a first-page dispatch from East Fork. It was the bloodhound story—not his own, but some other reporter's—well displayed by this competing newspaper. The *World*, evidently, had got the story before he reached the scene. Somebody was to blame for this; certainly not *he*.

With a sweeping return of his former emotions, he entered the city room. Bare and gloomy it was. All the lights were turned off, and, although the morning was bright outside, it was still night here. Only the outer edges of the room ever got more than a touch of daylight. The atmosphere was full of dust, and Dent coughed as he stood for a moment trying to accustom his eyes to the pall. Then he walked over to Tompkins' desk, about which one of the sweepers was at work. Stooping, he looked under it. Tompkins was in the habit of throwing a litter of paper under his feet as he worked, for

the janitors to clean up in the morning. Often, Dent had seen that under-space half-full of discarded copy and proofs. Now, however, it was empty.

"Do you know what became of the waste-paper?" he asked.

The man, who spoke English imperfectly, shrugged his shoulders.

"I dunnaw," he said. "Maybe you see Hans; maybe he know."

Hans was the janitor in charge of the *Sentinel* rooms. To find him required half an hour; when Dent located him, he was down in the subbasement, fifty feet under Park Row.

"I must find the waste-paper that was taken from under Tompkins' desk," the boy declared. "Find it for me, Hans, and I'll give you a dollar."

The man led him through dark passageways and past ponderous boilers. It was like the hold of a ship, he thought, as the heat of a furnace came near blistering his face. Then they went through a black and ill-smelling room, and up an incline. Here, in the dim light of an incandescent or two, were many huge bales of waste-paper, awaiting shipment.

"Which is to-day's?" Dent asked, in dismay.

"Why, it would take me a year to look through all those; I must find to-day's."

Hans viewed the scene with the eyes of a connoisseur; then he dragged forth a musty-smelling burlap sack that bulged like the mythical pack of St. Nicholas.

"Here!" he said, in triumph, pocketing his dollar. "Here you find him, sure! Tompkins' an' Hopson's an' copy-readers'—you find everybody's old papers right here. What you lost—money?"

"No," said Dent, taking off his coat; "if it were only money, it wouldn't worry me. I rather think I've lost my job."

PROOF

CHAPTER VII

THE PROOF OF IT

DENT was a few minutes late in reaching his desk that day, for he had kept up his search in the subbasement until he barely had time to get home and back again. To go home was imperative, for his suit had been ruined in his New Jersey adventure. Mournfully, indeed, did he put it aside for his older brown suit. The Lockwood purse would feel the drain of new clothes sadly.

All the *Sentinel* men were at their desks when he came in; some of them pretended not to see him; others spoke to him with forced cheerfulness. Nobody referred to the East Fork story; he would hear from it soon enough, they knew. It was all off with Lockwood this time, the whole staff was certain. Well, he had been a very decent sort of cub, and it was a pity. He was a good chap, modest and quiet and always agreeable. The fellows liked him, as well as they could like any cub. Unhappily, however, he lacked the news-

paper knack; he wasn't cut out for the game, and perhaps, they told each other, in low tones, the sooner he found his real place in life the better.

Dent sat down at his desk mechanically and picked up a number of clippings that reposed there. The first was the *World's* story from East Fork. It bore a long red mark, the whole length of it. The second clipping was shorter; it was also a dispatch from East Fork, taken from the *Times*, and another perpendicular red line marked it as a scoop against Dent. There were two more clippings, cut from the *Tribune* and *Sun*, and classified in the same way by Hopson.

Dent said nothing, but there was a grim line at either corner of his mouth as he glanced through these newspaper stories. As a whole, they were very much like the one he had sent in himself. His own account, he was sure, had been just as good as any of them. He crumpled them up and tossed them under his desk.

Then he sat there as the reporters, one by one, were called to Hopson's desk and given their afternoon assignments. Hopson was always a loud talker—except when he discussed confidential work with his men—and Dent listened idly, awaiting his own turn.

Gilicuddy was already assigned to some secret

investigation, and had been relieved from all routine. Waterman had been sent out of town the night before on a Delaware mystery. Oppenheim, being the only one of this trio of stars available, was of course picked by the city editor to do the leading story of the hour, which chanced to be the Wall Street situation. Oppenheim was as good at finance as at romance. Usually he made romance of Wall Street, where the regular financial editor never saw anything but fluctuations in prices.

Putnam, who was a very small man with a very big head on narrow shoulders, was sent up to Bronx Park to report the doings of the new chimpanzee, who had been dubbed "Mr. Houlahan." Putnam was good at comical things. Rhinelander and Maxwell were detailed on the *Sentinel's* harbor-boat, christened "The Meet'em" because she spent her days going down to Quarantine and back, meeting vessels. McNaught was sent to cover a Brooklyn disappearance, and Wight was hurried off to catch a departing local celebrity and inveigle him into an interview. So it went, each man getting his stint, to go into the common hopper later on in the day, and come forth in the morning as part of New York's contemporaneous history.

As usual, Dent, as the least important of all the staff, was reserved for the last.

"Lockwood!" called Hopson, along toward two o'clock, and Lockwood advanced.

The city editor looked him over rather curiously. Dent was pale, but he stood very straight and proud, and his eyes looked directly into the other's.

"Lockwood," said Hopson, "to be frank with you, I scarcely expected to see you here to-day. I had an idea that you wouldn't think it worth while to report for duty. I'm sorry your perception is not more acute."

He spoke as if he were really sorry for the boy, rather than angry. Perhaps he was thinking, as he measured the youth with his eyes, that Dent was really meant for better things than ignominious discharge. A fine, pleasing specimen of young manhood he was, even as he stood there under the local chief's accusing gaze.

"I gave you a chance last night," Hopson went on. "I was really anxious to have you redeem yourself. I purposely held that East Fork dispatch so that I could put you to the test. I might have sent a man there in the afternoon, as the other newspapers did, but I held off in order to give the assignment to you at ten twenty-

two in the evening. I gave you eight minutes to make the Liberty Street ferry. Once, in my own assignment days, I caught that ferry in seven minutes from the time I left City Hall Plaza. Do you know how I climbed up the newspaper ladder, Lockwood? By doing things! I started in doing things when I went on the *Sun* as a cub. Ah! those were wonderful days, boy! Wonderful! Why, this newspaper game is luxury now compared to it!"

Hopson had quite forgotten to be angry. His mood was unusual. For a minute his eyes roved absent-mindedly to the ceiling as he leaned back in his pivot-chair and put his legs across the sliding shelf of his desk.

"In those days," he went on, "We had no automobiles to whisk us up and down Manhattan. There were not so many telephones—they were luxuries then. We had no typewriters, but had to grind out all our stuff with the laborious pencil. Work? Why, many a night I've done up a cab-horse and then done up myself over a desk for hours, working like mad, with the city editor standing over me with a club! There were no subways, no tubes under the Hudson—none of the time-annihilating miracles we have these days. Our young chaps to-day have no

conception of newspaper work as it was then. I tell you, Lockwood, the game was a fierce one when I was your age. And yet——”

Hopson paused, swung his legs off the desk-shelf, and straightened abruptly. His whole manner underwent a quick change, the reminiscent atmosphere leaving him. Once more he was the gruff, hot-blooded Hopson.

“And yet,” he resumed, “it is quite as necessary to do things to-day as it was then. If a fellow can’t do things, he needn’t expect to play in the game. It is a stirring game, Lockwood. It beats anything I know of for action and go. It’s a game to make a man’s blood course fast and his heart beat quick. It’s a game that takes nerve and daring—and once in a while desperate chances. It takes endurance and strength and wits. Above all, it takes the spirit of winning! I’ve been watching you, Lockwood. I’m afraid you haven’t that spirit. I might forgive you for all your failures if I knew you had the *spirit*. I did hope that you might show it last night. I didn’t want to turn you out, Lockwood, so I gave you a last chance. You fell down on it. We can’t use you here on the *Sentinel* after this week.”

Dent’s pallor had grown ghastly, but he smiled.

He was thinking of his wild race down Broadway, of his strategy in outwitting the policeman, of his hazardous leap from the bridge to the boat, of his narrow escape from death under the car wheels, and, finally, of his plunge down the embankment and the chance he had taken of breaking his neck. Ah! the spirit of winning! Did any newspaper cub, he asked himself, ever show it more strongly?

But of course Hopson didn't know what he had done. Indeed, how little did any one know how hard he had tried to succeed since the day he came on the *Sentinel*!

"Mr. Hopson," he said, his voice trembling a little, "if I prove to you that I did catch the thirty boat, and did go to East Fork on the last train, will you change your opinion of me? If I prove that the eastbound train was two hours late, and the bloodhound story was all on the wire and O.K'd at one fifty-two, will you let me stay here on the *Sentinel* and prove that I *have* the spirit of winning?"

Hopson, who had turned to his desk, looked up quickly, his expression changing from finality to inquiry.

"If you can prove it——" he began, and then instinctively looked across at Tompkins' desk.

Tompkins did not come on duty until six o'clock, and his desk was closed.

"I have the proof of it here," said Dent. In spite of his efforts to speak calmly, he found his voice quavering and hoarse. The triumphant moment he had anticipated had come. From his inside coat pocket he took some folded pages, and, laying them on Hopson's desk, opened them and smoothed them out. They had been badly crumpled and torn, but there was no question about them. There lay the East Fork dispatch just as Dent had written it, except that here the story was typewritten, as it had come from the telegraph-room across the hall.

Hopson bent over and looked at it. Without a word, Dent put his forefinger on some figures on the upper margin of the first page. They formed the notation of the operator who had taken the story, and indicated the minute when the last of the dispatch was received: "1:52."

Hopson took the pages in his hand and leaned back once more in his chair, with one foot on his desk. He adjusted his glasses, and then, without comment, read the story through with deliberation. When he had done this, he crumpled it up once more and dropped it on the floor. It was of no use now. Already the afternoon

papers were on the streets with a second-day story, and with pictures of the child and the bloodhounds. This dispatch of last night was ancient history. In the swift march of events, as Dent knew very well, his story—secured under such stress—was now worth less than the paper that bore it. He felt no grief over the present fate of the typewritten copy, but merely stood awaiting Hopson's verdict—awaiting it with the assurance that he had made out a complete case. He was shocked, then, when Hopson asked, bluntly:

“Who wrote that story for you, Lockwood?”

The color spread over the boy's white face. It flamed up into his cheeks and darted to his temples. Something snapped in his eyes. His lips twitched in the suddenness of his anger, and for a moment he found himself speechless. This insult, on top of all he had done, stung him to the very depths of his soul. He might have said something as biting as Hopson's remark itself, but the latter, with his eyes on the youth, got the first word.

“Wait!” he said, hastily. He saw the explosion that had come so near bursting. He realized, almost too late, that even a cub may retaliate. Hopson had seen cubs who would not,

no matter what was done or said to them; but here was a boy, he perceived, who would not bear more than the limit. From that moment, Hopson had a deep respect for Dent Lockwood—a respect never uprooted by events that transpired afterward. “Wait!” he repeated. “I had no intention of questioning your veracity. I was surprised; that was all.”

This was as near an apology as Hopson usually came, and Dent’s sudden wrath subsided.

“I wrote it myself,” he said, simply, but with a toss of his head. “I was the last reporter on the ground, Mr. Hopson; I imagine you know that as well as I. I saw none of them there; and, if I had, I scarcely think any of them would have taken the trouble to write a half-column story for me. Besides, I am able to do my own writing. I am sorry you suspected that I was not.”

He brushed away a mist from his eyes, displaying wide strips of courtplaster across his hand.

“I don’t know why Mr. Tompkins threw the story away,” he went on, a fresh tinge of resentment coming into his voice. “It was here in time, and I—I think it was well enough written to print. Mr. Tompkins doesn’t like me, sir. I suppose that was why——”

Hopson cut him short:

"The paper was crowded last night; Tompkins had to sacrifice something. He made a mistake of judgment in sacrificing this. If I thought for an instant that any member of the staff would let personal feeling influence him in the discharge of his duty——" Hopson's eyes flashed up at Dent, but he paused before he uttered the implied threat. "No," he resumed, quietly, "don't let a notion like that upset you. Remember, too, that Tompkins is your superior, and his acts are not to be questioned."

He took up his assignment book and ran his finger down the page.

"Let me see!" he mused. "What can I give you to-day? Of course I withdraw all that I said, Lockwood; you understand that. I want you here on the staff with us. I believe you'll make good. Ah! here's a story I want you to go out and cover: it's a hospital case up at Bellevue. There's a corking good yarn in it if it's properly handled. It may be a little hard to get, but do the best you can with it."

A minute later Dent turned away, after hearing the outline of the Bellevue story. A new exhilaration was in his blood. At last, after all his troubles, he seemed to be gaining the crest of the wave.

Hopson called him back for a moment.

"Lockwood," the city editor said, "that was a splendid story you wrote at East Fork. I really didn't think it was in you, but I'm glad to concede that it is. I'd far rather Tompkins had put your story on the first page than some of the stuff that was there. But of course that's all done and gone. In this business we must jump from mistakes to successes as fast as a kangaroo jumps across a stretch of brush. All right; go along."

Dent did go, flushed with happiness. Yet, despite his high spirits, there was a shadow that lay heavily across his path and filled him with vague forebodings of disaster. That shadow was the sinister Tompkins.

CHAPTER VIII

MISS CHARITY BRANDON

“**M**ISS Brandon, I want you to cover the strike meeting to-night up on Mulberry Street. No doubt you’ve been following the story; at least you’ll be able to pick it up without a great deal of trouble. I’m short of men you see.” Tompkins had the grace to conclude with a half apology. This was no assignment for a woman, and he knew it.

It was Hopson’s day off, and Tompkins was in charge of the city room. A dreary, wet April night it was, with the rain beating down in gusts upon the empty streets of the metropolis—empty as far as New York streets can be empty at eight o’clock in the evening. The homeward rush was over, and the commuters who lived in Jersey and on Long Island, and away up above the Bronx, were in their homes by this time. The army of shop girls and stenographers and factory women had scattered far and wide over the spreading wings of the city. The long night

would mean rest and security, as it should. But not so with Miss Charity Brandon.

Charity was a new girl on the *Sentinel*; indeed, she was the only girl in the city room. Some twist of fate or ambition brought her to New York from a western city where she had done newspaper work for a year or two, and chance had set her down at a desk in the *Sentinel* office. She had come with the expectation of doing feature work, rather than the more strenuous news-assignments. She was peculiarly fitted for the duties Hopson wanted of her. There was a place in the *Sentinel's* make-up for the bright, sparkling touches of which Charity was so capable. She saw New York with new eyes. With her pen (or, literally, her typewriter) she painted the sodden multitudes of the East Side as Rembrandt painted beggars. She was planning some day to write a story of the Ghetto, and now her characters were flashing through the pages of the *Sentinel*, sometimes gently humorous, sometimes softly tearful—always with an undercurrent of that tragedy from which the East Side is inseparable. Hopson liked her work; Tompkins did not.

It was not difficult to understand why Charity did not appeal to the night city editor. Never

were two persons farther removed from one another in characteristics than these two. Tompkins was the incarnation of realism; Charity the embodiment of the ideal. The thing that counted most in Tompkins' scheme of journalism was brute force. In his younger days he had been a veritable whirlwind of this very force. His victories had come like the triumphs of the battering-ram. He had achieved his success by his aggressive daring and his wonderful grip on public events.

Tompkins was about thirty, a college man, and presumably a good-looking chap in former days. Now, however, he had acquired an habitual scowl that had misshapen his face and given him a most unhappy aspect. His many enemies—he numbered them by the hundreds—made life quite miserable for him and kept him continually on the active defense. Indeed, he had come to regard all men as his natural adversaries, and to watch with crafty eyes for signs of attack, either physical or otherwise. Once or twice in recent years he had encountered the first form of revenge, but Tompkins was a big fellow—a veritable brute in strength—and few there were who cared to match blows with him.

Grotesquely opposed to him, then, was little

Charity Brandon, to whom the whole world was a studio, and to whom romanticism was the elixir of life. She was about twenty, rather under the normal feminine stature, and of willowy, graceful figure. Her face reflected her character. Fair, blue-eyed, and with wavy dark-brown hair, she made a pleasing touch there in the city room, out of place though she seemed. She brought with her, too, such a dainty atmosphere and quiet friendliness, together with an impalpable reserve, that the whole staff liked and respected her from the beginning. There was a sudden improvement in the manners and conversation of the city room from the hour Charity arrived.

It chanced that the young woman's desk was near Dent's at the side of the room farthest from the executive regions, and now, when Tompkins had given her this assignment, she came back to get her paper and pencils. Dent, looking up, saw that her face was troubled. He had heard what Tompkins had said, for, like Hopson, the night city editor had a habit of speaking loudly—a habit that often comes from autocratic authority.

The next moment Charity stepped over to the boy and asked, in tones that were cautiously

modulated so that Tompkins might not by any possibility overhear: "Will you please tell me, Mr. Lockwood, where this Mulberry Street strike meeting is to be held? Dear me! I ought to know Mulberry Street well enough. I've had two feature-stories over there already. One of them was up near the old police headquarters. I suppose every newspaper worker in New York knows number three hundred Mulberry Street—it's quite famous, isn't it? I'm learning New York very fast; but somehow I haven't kept track of the strike. Is it the garment workers who've struck?"

Dent arose from his chair and sat on the edge of his desk. "Yes," he said; "they're always striking, and I imagine they have good cause usually. I was over there once on a strike story. It's a rather——" He was about to say "a rather rough place," but he checked himself. He could see that she was half frightened already. "It's rather unusual for them not to strike," he substituted, smiling in a lame attempt to reassure her. He knew well enough that this Mulberry Street hall was not just the place for Charity. He was thinking, too, of an editorial the *Sentinel* had printed that morning, strongly antagonistic toward the strikers. For the first time,

Dent had consciously repudiated the views of his newspaper's editorial page. He knew the situation better than the man who had sat in the sanctum farther down the corridor and written the learned effusion. Indeed, Dent had gone so far as to assure Hollender that any man on the local staff could have written a more truthful editorial. Hollender had answered that it took all sorts of opinions to make up a world, and the less Dent criticized the editorial writers the safer his hide would be. Inwardly, Dent speculated on the possibility of writing editorials himself some day, in the far-off future.

"To get up there," he went on, to Charity, "you'd better take a surface-car down here on Park Row and go out the Bowery to Grand Street; there you can transfer to a car that'll take you over to Mulberry. You'll find the hall a little to the south, near Canal. It's on the fourth floor, and there isn't an elevator, but you can take your time climbing, you know. You can tell the place, Miss Brandon, from a blue light in front. It's a queer, ghastly sort of light—they're a ghastly lot, anyway."

Then, seeing the girl's face pale a little, he laughed. He was sorry he had made such comment. His indignation rose against Tompkins.

What right had any newspaper to send a girl—and a girl of this sort, especially—to cover a strike meeting in one of the roughest spots of New York? He hesitated, on the point of advising her not to go. It was not likely that many of those people had read the *Sentinel's* editorial, but no doubt some of them had. They were people of violent, untamed natures, despite their thralldom to the sewing-machine. Even if they did not hurt Charity, they might frighten her with their hysterical demonstrations. If she were his sister—— He shuddered at the thought of sending one of those sweet, delicate sisters of his to such a place.

“Yes,” she answered, brightening and tucking away a stray wisp of hair, “they *are* a pitiful lot, aren’t they? I’ve had glimpses of them on the East Side, you know, and it seems to me that most of them are ready to blow away the first time a good breeze comes along. I’d like so much to help them, but the only way I can do it is by writing. I’m really glad Mr. Tompkins gave me this assignment, because it gives me a chance to see the East Side after dark. You know I’ve always been over there in the daylight before. It—it’s perfectly safe, isn’t it?”

She asked the question with a curious appeal

in her blue eyes, and Dent thought he saw her lips quiver.

For another moment he hesitated. To tell her what he really thought, might be construed as disloyalty to the city room, where the staff was supposed to take whatever orders were issued, without question or comment. Tompkins had told the girl to go; *he* had no right to advise her to the contrary. Were Tompkins even to suspect him of such a thing, it would go hard with him. Still—— Again the vision of his own sisters flashed through his brain. Instantly his mind was made up. He would tell her the truth, Tompkins to the contrary notwithstanding. To let her go up there on Mulberry Street without knowing what she might have to face, would be pure cowardice on his part.

"No," he said, "it isn't safe. It's downright brutal of Tompkins to send you there. Of course you might get along all right, but there's a chance that somebody would call you to account for the editorial we printed this morning—you haven't read it, have you?"

Charity's eyes opened wide with horror.

"No!" she gasped. "Do you really think that I shouldn't go? But how can I help it? He's given me the assignment. I must go!"

"Well," returned Dent, standing upright and squaring his shoulders, "perhaps you must, but that doesn't alter the fact that you shouldn't." Although much older than he, the girl looked like a child beside him. "You really shouldn't, Miss Brandon. Tompkins ought not to let you go."

He spoke as if he half intended to repeal Tompkins' dictum, and Charity looked at him in surprise. It was pleasant, no doubt, to have a defender so stalwart, but she did not just understand how he was to help her. A cub reporter had about as much standing in a city room as a roundhouse groom in the cab of a locomotive.

"I'll tell you what I mean to do," Dent went on, his tones rising a little in his earnestness: "I'll go to Tompkins and ask him to give *me* the assignment. You see, I haven't got anything yet for this evening. I'll tell him that I've covered those Mulberry Street meetings before, and they're rather—rather rowdyish for a girl. I'll tell him——"

It was Charity's turn now to protest.

"No," she said, with a little catch in her breath; "you'll not do anything of the sort, Mr. Lockwood." She was the only one on the *Sentinel* who ever dignified him with the title "Mr." Some of the younger men called him

Dent, but most of the fellows used his full name, Lockwood, or perhaps shortened it occasionally into "Lock." "I couldn't think of letting you do it," she went on, and now she spoke as a woman to a boy, despite the formality of the "Mr." There was an odd smile on her lips, though her face had a singularly drawn look that was far from natural. "Why, I'd be a fine newspaper woman, indeed, if I shirked responsibility upon another just because there chanced to be a tinge of danger attached to it! Besides, Mr. Tompkins would eat you alive if you suggested such a thing—he's a regular bear, isn't he?"

Charity had been on the *Sentinel* staff long enough to get acquainted with Tompkins.

"I'm not afraid of Tompkins——" began the youth; but Charity cut him short as she took her hat from her desk and secured it on her head with a long hatpin.

"It would never do," she said. "He wouldn't let you relieve me, I know. He isn't that sort. It's awfully good of you, and I know you're a brave boy and would like to help me even if you sacrificed yourself. But I'm not that sort of girl, Dent; I'm really not."

He was glad she used his first name, instead of the cold "Mr. Lockwood."

"I'm sure Hopson wouldn't let you go, if he were here," he said. "I could explain to Hopson to-morrow——"

Just then he glanced toward the other end of the room and saw Tompkins himself coming down the aisle. Charity saw him, too, and the pallor of her face changed to pink. She did not want Tompkins to find her asking questions concerning the task he had given her. It was bad form, at least, to display any evidence of ignorance. Reporters were supposed to know things. Besides, she feared Tompkins meant to call her to account for delaying. Perhaps he even suspected what had been said between herself and Dent Lockwood.

"Good-by!" she whispered, hastily taking her coat from a hook in a near-by wall. "Good-by! There comes the ogre! I'm not afraid of Mulberry Street. Remember!—not a word to Tompkins!"

In a twinkling she was gone.

CHAPTER IX

INSUBORDINATION

“**L**OCKWOOD,” said Tompkins, when he reached the boy’s desk, “you’ll have to stop hindering the staff. I’ve noticed several times of late that you’ve delayed the men in various ways, and I want it stopped. You’re too heavy on conversation. Let the fellows alone when they’re busy, and don’t get to gossiping with the feminine side of the house. You’ve kept Miss Brandon standing here fully five minutes, when she was late as it was. You have enough to do attending to your own affairs. Here, now, I want you to go up to the Belmont and get a two-hundred-word interview from Hendricks, the arctic explorer. He’s in town for a day or two, and we can’t ignore him altogether, though we’ve had altogether too much about him of late. If I had my way, these arctic idiots—— Now get along! What are you waiting for?”

Tompkins always made it a point, when he had the assignments to give out, to pick a very unimportant one for Dent. He had fresh reason now

for disliking the boy, for Hopson had criticized his judgment in killing the East Fork dispatch. The fact that Dent had recovered the dispatch itself and shown it to Hopson, had aroused in his somber nature a deep wave of hatred.

"I—I——" stammered Dent, as he still lingered. "I—— Excuse me, Mr. Tompkins, but I meant to ask you to send *me* up to Mulberry Street, instead of Miss Brandon. I'd be very glad to go, sir! You know it's a—a rather rough place for a girl, and besides, she's not much accustomed to New York. If you'll let me do it, I'll run up there and relieve her. She could take my assignment at the Belmont, couldn't she? That would be easy. I'd like very much to go to Mulberry Street, sir. I'm sure I could handle the story, and I—I could fight better than Charity could—if it came to fighting."

Tompkins drew back against one of the desks and gazed at Dent out of lowering eyes. Most of the men were out on assignments, and there was nobody within immediate hearing, but Tompkins glanced around, presently, as if he wanted some one to bear witness to this amazing insubordination. Disappointed, he turned back to Dent.

"If I had wanted you to cover the strike meeting," he said, savagely, "I'd have sent you there!

If I'd wanted Charity to cover the Hendricks interview, I'd have told her so. Ha! I *thought* you were putting seditious notions into that girl's head! What have I said to you about minding your own affairs? If I must explain my actions, I'll tell you that I sent her over to Mulberry Street because I wanted a picturesque story such as you couldn't write in a hundred years! Do you understand?"

Dent, who had been red in the face even before this, was very much redder now. Yet there was a certain triumph in his resentment, for he had forced Tompkins to defend his unwarranted course in sending a frail young woman to a hot-bed of violence. In his heart he was sure that Tompkins' explanation was not true. Dent knew he could write well enough to cover a strike meeting, and he knew, too, that Tompkins did not like Charity's fanciful style. He knew that Tompkins was opposed to women in newspaper work, quite as much as he was opposed to cubs. It followed, then, that Charity had been sent to Mulberry Street out of sheer ugliness, just as he himself had been given the insignificant Hendricks interview out of spite.

However, Dent had no intention of antagonizing Tompkins any more than he could help. It

was unfortunate enough to have the man for an enemy at all.

"Very well, sir," he said, simply; "I'm sorry I mentioned it. I only thought of preventing possible trouble. I never thought of inciting sedition. Only, Mr. Tompkins"—his tone grew tense for a moment—"I've got sisters at home; I have four of them, sir."

"Then keep them where they belong!" retorted Tompkins, and walked away.

There was a fierce pleasure in Dent's eyes as he watched the man for a moment; the boy felt that this was a retreat, or something akin to it. He had shamed Tompkins; he was certain he had. Although he had not won his point, he had said things that stung. He had made the man out to be an oppressor of poor little Charity, whom he should have protected.

Well, it was fortunate, Dent thought, as he drew on his raincoat, that Tompkins lacked the power to discharge him. His tenure on the *Sentinel* would not be of five minutes' duration, had Tompkins anything to say about it. Neither would Charity's.

As he was whirled northward in the subway, he could not get Charity out of his mind. He wondered how she would get on, up there in that

motley, sordid, groveling throng on Mulberry Street. Dent knew the East Side. All his life he had known it. Even as a little chap, he had explored its tenement-lined streets, its half-concealed passages, its gloom-shrouded courts. The millions of persons who lived in it had been very wonderful to him—these people of all nations gathered there within a few square miles, like a vast horde of human ants. Their gaudy colors had fascinated him, their strange tongues had puzzled and amused him. Once, in curiosity, he had ventured, as a child, into one of the honey-combed tenements, and the darkness and horrors of the place had stayed with him ever since. In recent months, as a *Sentinel* man, he had grown quite intimate with the highways and byways and tall dungeons of the East Side. Often had he wondered how many of the same millions were left, and what had become of all the vast throng he had watched so curiously a few years before.

How would Charity Brandon make out with them now? True, in daylight, they were harmless enough. The curious observer could walk Hester or Rivington or Cherry Street in safety. Even Charity had gone there and found inspiration for her sympathetic sketches. But to-night it was different. For the time-being, these

trammeled denizens of the slums were unleashed animals; up in the Mulberry Street hall they would be as fierce as hungry tigers let loose together.

Dent was worried. He tried to argue to himself that it was all none of his affair, as Tompkins had told him. The *Sentinel* alone was responsible for Charity, and, as Tompkins had intimated, she might expect trouble if she elected the newspaper calling for her field of activity. But then, Dent reflected, Charity had never bargained to take dangerous assignments after dark. It was no part of a girl's newspaper work. What right had Tompkins to unload upon her frail shoulders the brunt of the *Sentinel's* unwise editorial? Why didn't he send the man who had written that editorial? Surely, that would be more consistent.

If Charity had not come to him as she did, to ask his assistance, perhaps Dent would not have given Mulberry Street so much thought that evening. But, in a way, he seemed to be involved in the matter, and if Charity should be set upon by those infuriated masses—— Well, he had a notion to go over there anyway!

However, he had his own duty pressing upon him, and he left the subway at Grand Central and

made his way to the street and into the towering Belmont Hotel, close at hand. In answer to his inquiry at the desk, the room-clerk telephoned upstairs to the Hendricks apartment, but the arctic explorer was out. To make sure, Dent quietly went upstairs himself and rapped at the door. He had learned that this precaution was usually wise. Nobody answered, however, and he went back to the lobby to wait. A great many people were lounging about the brilliant rotunda. The inclement weather outside made the light and warmth of the hotel very cheerful. Every chair was taken, but Dent was too nervous to sit down, anyway. He strolled restlessly to and fro, at times leaning against the counter and tapping the floor impatiently with his foot, or standing at the window and watching the taxicabs and pedestrians coming and going from the great depot across the way.

In reality, however, Dent saw only Mulberry Street and the disorderly throng in the fourth-story hall. He was sorry now that he hadn't at least warned Charity against displaying her paper and pencil—the tags of her calling. Except for these implements, she might perhaps escape challenge. But Charity, unhappily, was not accustomed to such precautions; she was quite

unfamiliar with New York itself. The boy felt certain she would walk straight into the trap.

Once more he tried the Hendricks apartment; still no answer. He had been at the hotel half an hour, and it seemed quite unlikely now that his prospective interview could be had for two or three hours. It was probable that his man had gone to the theater, or was spending the evening socially, he reasoned. A visitor in New York, he knew quite well, would not be apt to mope in a hotel room a whole evening.

To make sure that the polar hero was not somewhere about the dining-rooms or at the writing-desks, he had Hendricks "paged." A bellboy, resplendent in blue and gold, marched solemnly through the various public rooms of the hostelry, crying dismally: "Mr. Hen-n-dricks! Mr. Hen-n-dricks!" But no Hendricks responded.

Ordinarily, Dent would have settled down to make the best of it and wait. Many times he had spent the whole afternoon and half the night in such vigils, not daring even to absent himself for supper lest his man escape him.

But this time Dent walked out of the hotel without a moment's hesitation. With rapid strides he entered the subway portal, went down the stairs two steps at a time, and caught an

“express” train almost instantly. At Fourteenth Street he had barely time to run across the platform and board a southbound “local,” and a few minutes later he alighted at the Spring Street underground station. Not long afterward he was on Mulberry Street, not only famed upon a time as the thoroughfare housing “Headquarters” of the police, but equally famed for its evil. Often had Dent heard the old-time newspaper men relate tales of Mulberry Bend and its gangs of murderous thugs.

But if Mulberry Street had improved inwardly, it was much the same street outwardly. The same dismal tenements cast their depressing shadows across it; the same frowsy crowds of children—another generation of children now—played and fought in its gutters by day and slept in its dark cells by night; the same slatternly throngs of women toiled in its gloomy recesses; the same currents of dejected, ill-kempt, low-browed men moved to and fro along its unclean pavements.

The rain was now beating down in driving gusts and Mulberry Street, however lively it had been a few hours earlier, was peopled only by dim figures here and there, slouching along in the shadows on affairs of their own. A police-

man sauntered easily by, his heavy rubber coat glistening wet under an electric light, and his night-stick swinging in rhythmic unison with his ponderous and measured tread. On the other side of the street a woman garment-worker, huddled in a shawl, hurried toward the strike-meeting to take a belated part in its demonstrations. A mighty truck, well-nigh taking the whole of the roadway, thundered northward.

The blue light was now visible, and Dent quickened his steps into a run. Somehow, that ghastly-hued ray over the sidewalk seemed to signal him to hurry.

Meanwhile, Tompkins was worried. To do the man full justice, he was really worried over Charity. There were alleviating circumstances in Tompkins' life that partly accounted for his acts. Indeed, his friends sometimes claimed that he was not fully responsible. From the day he started out as a cub reporter, Tompkins had overworked tremendously. Never for a moment had he considered himself; always his paper. All his struggles, his schemings, his disregard for his associates, had been for the cause he was serving, not for his own benefit. Just as war

gives men license, so the newspaper battle had given Tompkins license, as he saw things. His great fund of energy and ingenuity had been drawn on, regardless of rest or food. He had burned the candle at both ends, and never once had any one accused him of dawdling or of cowardice. During his years of active reporting, his daring courage—often spectacular and fraught with danger—had been the talk of newspaperdom.

Now Tompkins brooded over Charity Brandon. After his little brush with Dent, he regretted having sent the girl on such work, and finally, after much effort, he got McNaught on the wire. McNaught and Wight had been sent on a crime story in a very unsavory district known in the vernacular as "Hell's Kitchen."

"McNaught," said Tompkins, "you can 'pass up' that affair, and get over as quick as you can to the strikers' hall on Mulberry Street. That Brandon girl is there, and you know she'd fly all to pieces if anything were to happen. I wouldn't have sent her up there if I hadn't been short of reporters to-night. That Mulberry crowd is a bad lot, you know. Take a taxi and hustle along, both of you. Don't mix in unless you have to. Just lay low in the background and watch things. The girl is green, and no

doubt she'll pull her pencil the first thing. I forgot to coach her on that point. You know we had a rather ugly editorial this morning—— Yes, very poor judgment! Get over there quick, and if any one lays a hand on her—— Well, I'll trust to you two men. I reckon you're equal to it."

He knew they were qualified for the task. Both McNaught and Wight were big fellows. They had gone through scores of strike battles, and could be depended on for nerve and strength. Both always went armed, for they were often given assignments that threw them in contact with desperate men. Once McNaught had been set upon by the "gashouse gang," and escaped with his life only because he "got the drop" on his foes. Both he and Wight could tell other tales of the same sort.

Tompkins hung up the receiver, but he still brooded. If these two men should get to Mulberry Street in time, he had no fear. They would nip in the bud any manifestation against the girl. But if they should not get there in time—— Well, he had done what he could to make amends for his hasty action.

CHAPTER X

A GIRL AT BAY

CHARITY Brandon stood in a farther corner of the strikers' hall, at bay. Her hat was gone, and her wavy tresses were flowing in disorder over her shoulders. There was a rent in her white linen waist, and a long red scratch on the slender arm she held before her in terrified defense, with her hatpin extended. Never had Charity's blue eyes been so big with fright; never had her face worn a pallor so bloodless.

Dent saw all this as he wedged his way through the clamoring, excited crowd of men and women confronting the girl. It was hard to get through, but he was stalwart beside the majority of these half-wrecks of humanity, and he elbowed and shouldered them aside with ruthless disregard for ribs or feet. He had heard the commotion from below, and had come up the long flights of stairs with a rush that had taken his breath. Now he was panting and flushed, but his reserve strength came to his aid.

"Stand aside!" he shouted, to a man who blocked him. And then, to the girl, he cried, over the heads of the mob that still separated him from her: "I'll be there in a minute, Charity! Keep up your nerve!"

He had never been forward enough to call her Charity before; she was a woman, he a boy. Yet it seemed very natural now to address her in that way, and he called again: "I'm coming, Charity! I'm coming!"

It was rash assumption to encourage her in this way, and in his heart he knew it. There were two or three hundred of them in the hall, and they were like infuriated cats. Small though most of them were in stature, and weak in physical strength, they possessed a demoniacal power in the aggregate. They were wrought to the pitch of fury, men and women alike, and poor Charity was the innocent object of their vengeance.

"I—I didn't write it!" Dent heard the girl's weak disclaimer above the babel of foreign exclamations and threats. "I—I tell you I had nothing to do with it! Please don't touch me again! I—I'm your friend."

"Stand aside!" shouted Dent, lowering one shoulder and putting all his strength into a lurch

that sent the man sprawling against his fellows. "Get out of my way!"—this was addressed to a hulking youth of his own age, and very nearly his own size—"Here! let me through!"

Over at the other side of the room he saw a *Herald* reporter, vainly trying to get to Charity's aid. Unhappily, he was a small man, and was hemmed in on all sides. At the back of the room Dent had caught a glimpse of a *Tribune* man, but he, too, had his hands full in the attempt to rescue the girl. These other reporters were not fresh from baseball and football, as Dent was. Yet even Dent felt the deterioration of his muscles since the preceding summer. A year previous he would have gone through that Mulberry Street mass of humanity like a motor-boat through a whitecap. He would have got to Charity's side, at least, whatever happened to him afterward. But now it did seem as if he were checkmated by this burly young man who blocked his passage.

"Stand aside yourself!" retorted the fellow, aiming a blow at Dent's jaw. "Who are *you*, anyhow, to be givin' me orders? You ain't no policeman! You're another reporter!"

"Another reporter!" The cry was taken up with foreign accents. "Another reporter!"

Dent ducked, and the blow went over his head. He was a good boxer, with some scientific training. However, he did not want to strike back. His whole purpose was to get through the rioters and shield Charity against them until the police should get there. He had passed an officer lounging at the street entrance below, and it seemed as if he must surely hear the disturbance and come up. But the moments were precious. These wild beasts could maim Charity in a minute or two. Even as he ducked the blow, he saw a haggard woman reach out with dirt-begrimed fingers to claw at her. He saw Charity seize the offensive wrist and force it away.

And then he heard the girl's voice again. This time she was calling to him:

"Hurry, Dent! Oh, hurry!"

Hurry he did. With another lurch, he passed the youth who had stopped him, and in a moment he would have been beside Charity. But the maddened fellow lunged after him and seized him by the arm, twisting it back until Dent thought it was broken. Then a dozen persons swarmed once more between him and the girl.

Bad as the situation was for himself, it had the effect of easing the tension for Charity. Backed into the corner, with a new terror in her eyes,

she watched the struggle and was for the time unmolested herself.

There was no help for it now: Dent had to strike his assailant. With his free hand he swung a staggering blow on the fellow's cheek and sent him reeling and dazed. In spite of the jam about him, the man went through them and measured his length on the floor.

Instantly, the scene became a *melée*, in which Dent and his adversaries were indistinguishable to the girl. She believed he was being killed, and she screamed and begged them to desist. He was not to blame, either, for the editorial, she assured them. He was merely a boy.

"Don't kill him! don't kill him!" she cried.

She had almost forgotten herself now, and she seized a man by the shoulders and dragged him back so unexpectedly that he lost his balance and went down under a swarm of feet.

But if Dent were merely a boy, he showed these folks what kind of boy he was. From the jam and dust he emerged presently, capless, collar hanging by a shred, and with blood on his face, but still towering a head above them. He was gasping for breath, but so were others.

There was a momentary lull, for this pace was something new to the garment-workers. They

were accustomed to speeding on the sewing-machines. Indeed, they were forced to speed to the limit many hours a day in order to earn the barest of livelihoods. But they were quite incapable, as a body, of great physical endurance.

However, there were plenty of men and women in the hall who had not been able so far to take an active part in the battle, and now these fresh recruits rushed forward, while the exhausted ones drew aside. Once more the impulse of the mob was directed toward Charity.

"The girl! the girl!" somebody shouted. "She's our enemy! She says we are paid all we deserve! Tear her eyes out! Pull her hair! Show her that she can't write such things about us!"

Their grievance, very real and bitter, moved them to swing with fresh violence toward the half-fainting *Sentinel* woman, but now Dent stood in front of her, and met the onslaught himself. For a few seconds he parried the clumsy attacks, but he saw that this defense could not last against a multitude. He might have stood there at bay against a dozen of them, perhaps, for he knew how to meet them, but to keep hundreds of them off was another matter. They were determined to punish Charity, and unless

help came at once he could not save her. How far they might go, he could only guess. In their unreasoning anger, they might even kill her. It would not take much to kill Charity, he thought.

Anxiously, he glanced toward the door, hoping to see the huge forms of the police looming there. Even one bluecoat, he knew, could strike terror to the hearts of this unorganized mob. It seemed to him that time enough had elapsed since he entered the hall for all the reserves in New York to get there. In reality, the whole scrimmage had taken not more than two minutes.

No policemen were in sight. The situation was desperate. He crowded the cringing girl farther back into the corner, and his fist swung in an arc before him, striking several heads in its journey. Then, with a quick movement, he wheeled and threw open a window back of him.

Dent was quite familiar with the architecture of the tenement district. Countless times he had gazed from the streets upon the maze of family-washings hung on the iron fire-escapes and balconies connecting. He knew that these precarious ledges fulfilled so far as possible the

sphere of a back yard. The children clambered over them, and often fell off, and in hot weather the whole household frequently slept on them. Now Dent, with intuitive purpose, expected to find an iron balcony outside this window—and he did! For a single second he had his head out, measuring the chances.

In another second he was fighting again. Blows fell on him, and he returned them with doubled interest. The crowd pressed upon him to prevent escape through the window, but in some way—just how it came about he could not tell—he got Charity on the sill, and then outside. He backed out himself, still fighting.

There were other windows, however, that also opened on the balcony, and out of those windows came a swarm of the Mulberry folk, blocking the descent down the ladder.

“Get back of me!” cried Dent, hoarsely, to Charity. “Back—back against the wall! Up in the corner! Now, get hold of the rail and don’t let them drag you away! There! Now let them come! I’m not done for yet, Charity! I can fight longer than they can!”

Then, leaning over the rail for a moment, he called down in a voice that was very short of breath:

"Police!"

Charity echoed it feebly and shrilly: "Police!"

From up the street they caught the flash of a metal badge. The guardian of the law had wandered a block from his post at the door. But now he came at the signal, and they saw his form sway, and heard the sharp snap of his huge shoes on the stone.

In that interval of waiting, Dent had a confused recollection of the other policeman on Broadway, the night he had made his fast race to Liberty Street. Then, he wished all the police force had been in Africa; now, he wanted a whole company right here in Mulberry Street. Strange how situations could change! he thought. Dent had acquired some acquaintance with the police since he had been in newspaper work. His judgment upon them had altered somewhat since he had come to see them at close range. In former days he had held them in light disdain; he had considered them a lot of semi-loafers who gloried in rather brutal authority. Well, perhaps they were brutal, some of them, and ungainly, and vulgar. But one thing was sure: wherever there was danger, they were there; wherever other men feared to go, the police went; no emergency was too desperate for them, no odds

too great. If grim courage were called for, rarely indeed was it lacking in the police.

But this was really the first time in the boy's life when the true significance of New York's magnificent army came home to him—that splendid army of ten thousand picked men who keep the knives of the cutthroats off the necks of honest people; and the hand of anarchy from destroying the metropolis. He realized it now, as he heard the shrill whistle reverberating through the cañon of Mulberry Street. He saw, a moment later, the flash of another badge down toward Broome Street, and still another as it came around the corner from the direction of Baxter Street.

There was a sudden check in the impulse of the mob. A woman had just reached under Dent's arm to seize Charity by the hair, but she stood for a moment motionless, and then released her grip and backed away. A fist had been raised to strike Dent between the eyes, but it, too, fell limp. There were cries in varied languages, and then a backward movement all through the crowd that filled the balcony and the hall behind it.

Inside, a mighty clatter arose. There was a stamping of feet like the noise a herd of wild

horses might make. Shouts arose, and oaths, and the sickening thud of the night-sticks. Chairs and tables were smashed to splinters in the rush to escape the police, and for a minute the whole great room seemed a chaos of swirling humanity, bathed in dust.

But it was over quickly, and Charity, clinging to Dent out there on the ledge over Mulberry Street, looked up into the face of a brawny man in a rubber coat, who put an arm about her and lifted her back through the window.

CHAPTER XI

THE SHADOW OF TOMPKINS

DENT took Charity home in a taxicab the police got for her. She lived with an aunt in an apartment west of Central Park, so the ride was a considerable one. Charity begged to be taken to the *Sentinel* office, so she might write the picturesque story Tompkins had sent her to get, but Dent refused to do this. He knew that Charity could not do any writing that night. Indeed, she could scarcely walk to the elevator, and when they emerged from it at the thirteenth floor she weighed heavily on his arm. It was the arm, too, that the big youth at the hall had doubled back, and Dent came near crying out with pain as he took the girl to the door of her aunt's apartment and left her there in her relative's charge.

Dismissing the cab, he made his way to the subway and rode back to Grand Central. He presented a distressing spectacle, and during the journey was the center of all eyes in the car. However, there was a wild exultation within him,

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and he cared little for the curious glances. Hopson had told him that men in newspaper work must "do things" if they expected to get on. Well, he had done things that night.

He knew where he could find a little furnishings shop that kept open evenings. It was tucked away under the lee of the overshadowing station, and here he secured a cap and collar and tie, and made himself as presentable as he could. Then he crossed the street to the Belmont Hotel once more.

But Hendricks had come and gone—gone for good, the clerk told him. Yes, he had settled his bill at the cashier's window, taken his baggage, and left town.

Once more Dent went upstairs to make sure. He rapped on the door of the room Hendricks had occupied, and, getting no response, tried the knob. The door opened and showed him the empty room. It was clear enough that his man had escaped him.

Dent went back to the *Sentinel* office with mingled emotions of guilt and self-acquittal. He had deliberately disobeyed orders and "fallen down" on his story, though he had saved Charity from injury, perhaps from death. But he knew Tompkins.

"There was some trouble over on Mulberry Street," he said, when he stood at the desk of the night city editor. "While I was waiting for Hendricks, I ran over there. You see——"

Tompkins cut him short. Already, with the quickness police news has in traveling over the well-greased channels that lead to the New York newspaper offices, Tompkins knew the full story of Charity's adventure. Within a few minutes after the police quelled the disturbance, every city editor in town had the details. The *Sentinel's* police reporters, watching at Headquarters and elsewhere for something to turn up, were always in touch with their offices from early evening until after the last forms were closed in the small hours that precede the dawn.

Moreover, Tompkins had learned the news from two other sources. One source was Charity herself, who had talked with him over the wire from her home, and said heroic things about Dent. The other source was McNaught and Wight, who, arriving at Mulberry Street a minute after Dent and Charity had left it, had secured the whole story and returned to the office with it.

Tompkins, then, was in a mood to be even less friendly than usual. Dent had disobeyed, yet



" 'GO SIT DOWN!' HE COMMANDED. 'I'LL SEE TO THIS LATER.' "—Page XXX ~

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if he hadn't done so, what would have happened to Charity? Tompkins' anger toward the boy was flavored with the realization that the latter had acted wisely and bravely, while he himself was open to rebuke from Hopson. The onus of the thing must fall on him; the cub reporter was a hero.

"Never mind about Mulberry Street!" he snapped. "How about the Hendricks interview?"

Dent hesitated. It would have been easy to squirm out of his dilemma by saying that Hendricks wouldn't talk, but the boy detested subterfuges.

"I—I'm sorry," he said, "but I missed Hendricks while I was over on Mulberry Street. He's gone, Mr. Tompkins."

Tompkins took his pipe from his lips, leaned back in his chair, and glared at the boy. Yet there was very little he could find to say. Besides, the Hendricks interview was inconsequential; he had told Dent so himself.

"Go sit down!" he commanded. "I'll see to this later."

Dent turned away; then he came back rather timidly.

"I—I can write that Mulberry yarn, Mr.

Tompkins, if you'd like. I'd be glad to do it," he said. "Oh, I don't mean that I want to say anything about my own part in it! Of course I wouldn't do that, anyway. But the riot was a very pretty one for a few minutes. I'd like to write it, Mr. Tompkins."

Never before had he made a request of this sort, either of Tompkins or Hopson. Always he had taken the work given him, without a murmur, and stayed by it through thick or thin, success or disaster. But now it did seem as if he were entitled to special consideration. Surely, he could be forgiven for doing what he had, in view of the outcome. Tompkins personally ought to thank him.

But Tompkins did not.

"When I want you to write a story, I'll inform you," he roared. "Do you know that you've laid yourself open to discharge to-night? Oh, I don't care about excuses! Who constituted you the Brandon girl's guardian? For your own information, I'll tell you that I assigned other men to look after her. They happened to be a trifle late in getting there, but a minute or two would have made no great difference. The girl was in no danger anyhow, until you showed yourself. Riot! Of course there was a riot

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when you butted in like a Comanche Indian! You'd stir up a riot at a funeral. Now see here, Lockwood, the next time you take it upon yourself to disobey orders, I'll see that you're fired on the spot! Do you understand?"

The two glared at each other a moment, and Dent's lips trembled in anger. He felt the injustice of the night city editor's characterization of the Mulberry Street affair, but he knew that technically he had laid himself open to discharge. A realization of this kept back the rush of hot words.

"Very well, sir," he said, and turned away.

Filled with bitterness, the boy took his seat at his desk. It was seldom that a chance came his way to write a really good story, and now to have it refused him was even worse punishment than the threat Tompkins had made to discharge him. His progress on the newspaper seemed mortally slow. Since the East Fork episode, he had been all aglow with ambition, but things had settled back into the old routine of obituaries, insignificant interviews, or the round of the corner's office and city morgue. True; he was often sent out with the older men to help on higher-class work, but seldom was he called on to write any part of these stories. Either he telephoned

his facts to men in the office, or took in his notes and explained them to the "rewrite" fellows. What he wanted to do most of all was *to write*.

He sat at his desk a long time, and then Tompkins came out on the floor and said that all men who had finished their work could go home. Dent put on his raincoat—torn in half a dozen places and ripped up the back—and went down. He made his way to a little restaurant in a basement off Frankfort Street, and spent an hour there over a twenty-cent lunch. He was resolved not to go home until he read the Mulberry story.

When he had loitered at the restaurant as long as he cared, he walked over to Broadway and strolled up that street to Houston, and back. It was still raining, but what did he care? Rain was only a trifle beside what he had faced that night. He was far too wrought up to go home and sleep, and he didn't mind walking.

After that, he strolled about City Hall Plaza, or down Murray Street to West Broadway, or over into the darker tenement regions that lay toward the East River. It was all shadowy and mysterious and a bit depressing. New York was lively and cheerful by day, even in its worst quarters, but at night it made a fellow feel queer.

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How could all the millions of people find places to sleep? he wondered.

Finally he wandered back to Park Row from one of these aimless excursions, and heard the roar of the *Sentinel* presses as they tossed out the last edition from their swiftly working jaws. He watched them through a basement window, and then strolled along.

Suddenly he drew back and hid behind the hood of the subway entrance under the approach to Brooklyn Bridge, for he saw a shadow that he recognized as Tompkins'. The shadow swayed like a drunken man's as it drew near the stairway in the sidewalk, and for a moment Dent caught sight of the man's haggard face. If he had not known that Tompkins never touched a drop of liquor, he would have believed him intoxicated. As it was, he knew that the night city editor was going home after his long watch, exhausted. He had done Hopson's work and his own that day; he had been on duty more than fourteen hours.

A sudden revulsion in Tompkins' favor swept over Dent. Perhaps, as the fellows said, he wasn't to blame for his tempers. For the moment, the boy forgave him.

The last edition was on the street, finally, and

Dent bought a copy of a bawling newsboy, and climbed the stairs to a Bridge train for home. On the way, he read the Mulberry story, as McNaught had written it. A straight-away, matter-of-fact yarn it was, well enough written, but lacking wholly the picturesque turns Charity would have given it. Dent was sure that he himself could have made a better story of it. It fell so far short of the vim and go and excitement of the thing as he had seen it! If ever he got a chance to write a story so stirring, he would show Tompkins—— Well, there was no good in boasting.

He folded the paper with a new tinge of bitterness, for nowhere in it had there been more than a passing reference to himself, or, indeed, to Charity. "A *Sentinel* man," and "a *Sentinel* woman," was the way the thing read. The riot, to judge from the narrative, was chiefly among the strikers.

But of course Dent had quite expected this. It would not have been good form to play up a *Sentinel* man as the hero, or a *Sentinel* woman as the heroine. Tompkins had merely followed an unwritten law in ordering the story constructed that way.

Dent sighed. For his night's work he had

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nothing to show—not even the little Hendricks interview. At any rate, he was glad McNaught hadn't referred to him in the story as the cub reporter. It was cheering to be “a *Sentinel* man.”

CHAPTER XII

A POLITICAL STORY

IT was the first warm night of spring. Up in the *Sentinel* editorial rooms it was really hot. All the afternoon the late May sun had poured into the unshaded windows back of Hopson's desk, for the seventeenth floor was too high to get any protection from other edifices across from City Hall Park. Down in the financial district the sun scarcely penetrated, and the drafts that swept through the narrow streets kept the temperature down to a comfortable point. Here, however, the atmosphere was well baked, and all the *Sentinel* men in the city room were working in their shirtsleeves.

Perhaps two-thirds of the typewriter-desks had occupants, for the hour was near eleven and most of the evening assignments had reached the stage of literary construction. Hopson always contended that *Sentinel* English—and the English of most well-edited newspapers—was quite as much entitled to literary distinction as the product of the book and magazine world.

Indeed, he sometimes clipped whole pages from current novels and posted them on the bulletin-board in the city room as examples to be avoided. Certain it was that under Hopson's guidance the diction of the *Sentinel* men was remarkably direct and intelligible. He had a theory that the best writing was usually done under pressure. Gilicuddy and Waterman and Oppenheim turned out their cleanest and most gripping stories when the minutes were precious and the pages were sent in short "takes" to the composing-room. It was all in the concentration, he held—given the ability, of course, to start with.

"The best yarn we've printed in months was that explosion story of Waterman's," he had said more than once; "why, I know at least three novelists who turned green with envy when they read it. One of them remarked to me that whoever wrote that first-page column must have polished it pretty well before he turned it in. Every line, every paragraph, he observed, stood out like a white frieze against black. The incidents of the explosion, he said, followed each other with the shock and distinctness of reality. Well, this novelist wouldn't believe me when I told him that Waterman had written the column in exactly twenty-four minutes, and hadn't glanced

back over a single line of it. It was inconceivable to him—never having been under the newspaper pressure—that any chap could produce such a word-picture in that fashion. He would have taken a day over it, himself. He laughed at me, too, when I ventured the belief that the copy-readers, aside from correcting typographical errors and perhaps putting in some marks of punctuation, hadn't changed ten words of Waterman's copy."

Hopson liked stories that gripped; he was not a stickler on the fine points of grammar or syntax. Dickens, he declared, had got a grip on the whole world without paying great heed to the rules of professors who never had written anything themselves. So the *Sentinel* stories must grip, regardless of concealed grammatic snares. He could stand a split infinitive better than a paragraph that produced no sharp impression or definite emotion on the brain of the reader.

The *Sentinel* men, then, were generally adept at this sort of thing, and on this particular May night the evidences of mental concentration and fast work were even more striking than usual.

Gilicuddy was at work on a story from police Headquarters, not wholly complimentary to the Commissioner or Inspectors. It was a long

narrative, and Hopson wanted it completed in time for the mail edition. Gilicuddy, therefore, had dispensed even with his customary pipe of tobacco, and was getting down to business in a way that seemed to threaten the typewriter with annihilation. He was a lank man, with stooping shoulders, and now he leaned over the machine in a hump something like that of a hook-and-eye, his elbows projecting at the sides and gyrating in a rather comical way. His collar and tie lay on the floor back of his chair, and his coat and vest were in a heap where they had slid off the dictionary-stand.

Waterman, too, was late with his assignment. He had been out of town on an aeroplane story, and now he was working as if the very demon of energy had him. He was the fastest man in the city room, when it came to construction, despite his size; he weighed two hundred, and stood six feet in his shoes. How those great hands of his ever manipulated the keys of the typewriter had always been a mystery to Oppenheim, who was a small man with long, slender fingers.

Oppenheim sat next to Waterman, and Waterman sat next to Gilicuddy. These three luminous stars of the *Sentinel* now made an impress-

ive picture, as they presented their respective backs to the surly gaze of Tompkins, who had come from his desk to stir them up. How three human machines could be stirred up when they were already going at one hundred and fifty per cent. efficiency, would have been puzzling to anybody except Tompkins.

"Hustle that graft story along a little faster, Oppenheim," he said, as he looked over the reporter's shoulder. Then, without apology, he reached across to the machine and pulled out the page on which Oppenheim was working.

"Hold on there!" yelled the latter, reaching for the page, which Tompkins promptly held out at arm's length. "Hold on there——" He jumped to his feet as if he meant to chuck Tompkins under the chin. Instead, he merely demanded: "What's the last word?"

" 'Sing Sing,' " Tompkins told him, glancing at the manuscript he had so rudely acquired; " 'Somebody is bound to break into Sing Sing' —that's the last sentence. Now get busy!"

Oppenheim grabbed another sheet of copy-paper and rolled it into the machine. Then he was at it again without deigning to give the tyrant further attention.

Tompkins repeated this incident at Water-

man's desk, and then at Gilicuddy's, producing momentary eruptions at both places, but leaving all the members of this trio of stars working at two hundred per cent. efficiency; that is, doing double the work a normal man should. On the way back to his desk, Tompkins spoke most impolitely to a copy-boy who was loitering, and sent him off in a hurry after Rhinelander's copy, at the far end of the room.

Rhineland, who had paused an instant to give his next-door neighbor a match, was reminded rudely by the copy-boy that Tompkins was on another rampage; so he, too, dug into his task with renewed vigor. Maxwell, who chanced to be this next-door neighbor who was relighting his pipe, gave a nervous glance and forgot to strike the match, but doubled over his machine and made the keys fly.

Putnam and Scarsdale had witnessed these incidents; they exchanged significant glances and thumped noisily. McNaught shrugged his broad shoulders. The copy-boy touched Wight on the arm as he passed, remarking: "Better tuck that gun in, Wightie! It's hangin' out o' your hip pocket by its heels."

The whole staff, in fact, worked with greater nervous energy because of Tompkins, and even

Charity Brandon, who was writing a circus story, struck the keys of her machine faster when she saw the night city editor coming back to prod up the three stars again. The circus had opened that night at Madison Square Garden, and Charity was to have two-thirds of a column. It was Hopson who had scheduled it, not Tompkins.

Hopson himself was still at his desk. He had been downstairs for an hour, consulting the managing editor about a political story. When he stayed late in the evening, Hopson usually took only a passive part in the detailed work of the staff. There were big stories to map out sometimes, and matters of policy to be discussed with the management, or things of that sort to attend.

But now Hopson came out into the middle of the floor and looked about him. Then he went over to Gilicuddy's desk.

"Gil," he said, "I'm afraid you'll have to cut that Headquarters story short. How near are you through with it?"

"I've a couple of hundred words more to write," Gilicuddy returned, yanking out his page and passing it to Tompkins, who came up at the moment. "I can drop it where I am, if you wish."

Tompkins scowled, but Hopson was his superior.

"All right," the latter said; "better break it off short. I want you to get out on a matter of politics. There's a big deal afoot in the local Democratic ranks, and Farlahan has 'fallen down' on it. He's just reported that he can't land it."

Farlahan was the chief political reporter. He loomed big in the *Sentinel's* scheme of things, for politics go to make up a very important phase of journalism. Farlahan was a man of forty, of wide experience and unquestioned ability. He had been the *Sentinel's* chief Washington man several winters, and had covered the legislature at Albany at other periods. His specialty had been politics even in the days when he began newspaper work on the Pacific coast. By degrees, he had worked eastward, stopping a year or so at Salt Lake, at Denver, at Chicago; running down to Atlanta for six months; doubling back to New Orleans for a winter, and finally, after working on papers in all these cities, landing in New York. Here he found activity enough to suit him, and complicated politics enough to keep his brain and fingers well engaged.

What Farlahan did not know about politics

was scarcely worth knowing, and just at present the muddled condition of affairs at home had kept him away from both Washington and Albany; he had a field for his genius right in New York. Tammany affairs were sizzling hot.

Farlahan had a room by himself, down the corridor, and thither Hopson sent Gilicuddy.

"Talk it over with him," directed the city editor, "and then get out as quick as you can. Round up all the big politicians you find and pump them dry. Farlahan knows there's something spectacular in the wind, but he hasn't been able to land it. He's got to have help."

Then Hopson turned to both Waterman and Oppenheim.

"Finish up in a hurry," he said, "and talk to Farlahan. He can use you men, too. Say, Tompkins, I'll have to use every man you can spare on this political story. There's a break in the Tammany ranks—Farlahan thinks it's the biggest split ever known. It's a red-hot row, and we've simply got to get something on it. Push these other stories through and send all the men you can to Farlahan. He'll make out a schedule of interviews, and we'll rake the whole town between now and two forty-five. We'll get hold of every Democratic boss we can drag

out of bed or out of his hole, and we'll make somebody talk."

It was soon after this that Dent Lockwood came in from an assignment. He looked hot, tired, and discouraged, and, walking rather listlessly to Tompkins' desk he made his report:

"I couldn't find my man, sir. I was told at half a dozen places that he'd gone out of town, but to make sure I tried half a dozen other places. If he isn't out of town, sir, I don't know where he is. If you wish, I'll go out again. I don't like to give it up——"

"Drop it!" broke in Tompkins, in the sarcastic tone he usually used to the boy. "I knew very well you couldn't find him."

Tompkins spoke the truth when he said this, for he had sent the boy on a wild-goose chase purposely, knowing full well that the man in question was really away from New York. Tompkins relieved his temper sometimes by sending men out on errands he knew to be fruitless. If Tompkins took a dislike to a man he had the power to make that man's life a burden.

"Go along home!" he added, and thus dismissed Dent with an air that said plainly enough: "You're no account around here."

The boy went to his desk to get a parcel he

had left there in the afternoon, and, noticing the tension in the city room, he said to Charity:

"What's on to-night? Anything special turned up?"

"Not much of consequence," laughed the girl, her hands poised over the white keys of her machine. "Only some political story—you know how much I dislike politics! I'm especially glad to-night, Dent, that I'm a feature writer. Dear me! I'm half afraid Tompkins will send me out on it yet! I know as much about politics as I do about the moon. It seems as if every man on the staff has been told to report to Mr. Farlahan. Haven't you anything to write? Then you've been ordered to Farlahan's room, too, haven't you?"

Dent sat down at his desk, rather suddenly.

"No," he said, with a frown. "I've been ordered to go home."

Charity gazed across at him in pity.

"I believe," she said, consolingly, "that Tompkins treats you worse than ever, since that Mulberry Street affair. If I were you, I believe I'd have a talk with Mr. Hopson about it. Tompkins is really shameful!"

"It would only make things worse," declared Dent, kicking the footrest of his desk with

vicious little swings. "It would only emphasize the way in which I 'fall down' on 'most every assignment Tompkins gives me. To-night is a fair example. For hours I've been hunting and hunting for a man, but of course I couldn't find him. I don't see why I always have such luck. I know I work as hard as the other fellows, but I don't seem to get anywhere. To-night every man on the staff is being rushed to death—but look at me! I come in without a line, and Tompkins sends me home in about the fashion a school teacher would tell a fellow to go stand on the platform!"

Dent looked gloomy enough. He dug his fists down into his trousers pockets, slouched low in his chair, and presented a picture of melancholy that caused Charity to feel very sorry for him.

Then suddenly he sat up.

"Charity," he demanded, "am I actually such a fool? Do you think I'll ever amount to anything in the newspaper business. Tell me what you really think!"

The girl let her hands drop from the keys, while she leaned back and gave the disheartened boy a sparkling look of encouragement.

"What a question!" she said, laughing.

"Why there are a lot of men on the staff who can't begin to write as well as you do; and when it comes to doing things outside—— Well, you *do* things!"

Dent's face brightened.

"I wish you were city editor," he said. "But you've helped me a lot with my writing, anyway, and I'm awfully obliged to you, Charity. Don't let me interfere with your story. Tompkins——"

Just then a copy-boy came along on a hop-skip-and-jump.

"Mr. Tompkins wants the rest of your copy right away!" he announced, to Charity. "Gimme it!"

"I'll have it done in five minutes," said Charity, and straightway she forgot Dent as she rounded off her elephants and tigers.

It was midnight. There was nothing to keep Dent any longer, but for some reason he remained there at his desk. His machine was folded down inside, and he rested his elbows on top and his chin on his knuckles, in a meditative attitude. Very unpleasant it was to reflect that even in the midst of all this belated activity, Tompkins had dismissed him for the night. Such action spoke volumes for Tompkins' opinion of

him. True, he was tired enough to go home, but he disliked being ignored. He did not hanker for politics, but he did feel himself just as capable as some of the other men to take a political assignment. He had been reading Farlahan's stuff very conscientiously of late, knowing that sooner or later he might be called upon unexpectedly. Now to go home in the midst of it all was galling.

"Charity," he said, suddenly, when the girl had delivered her final page, "what is this great political story that all the fellows are working on? Have you heard anything about it?"

"Not very much," she admitted, as she pinned on her hat. "It's something about Tammany. Why, I scarcely know what Tammany is! Whatever it is, its cracked, or split open, or exploded, or something. That's what Hopson wants to find out. What is Tammany, Dent?"

"It's a sort of political organization," explained the youth, hurriedly, as he stood up and put on his hat. "It's the most famous and powerful political power in the country, I suppose. It's — Did you hear anything else about the story, Charity?"

"No, except that the *Sentinel* really had to have it. Farlahan 'fell down' on it, you see.

Just think! I had no idea Mr. Farlahan could 'fall down' on anything! I thought——"

But Dent, with a somewhat rude farewell, was gone. He walked rapidly out of the room, straight to the door of Farlahan's office. It was not worth while to go to Tompkins first, he thought; he knew well enough what Tompkins would say. He was free for the night, and if he chose to offer his services to Farlahan, it was nobody's business.

Dent meant to tell Farlahan about his queer acquaintance with Barney McSweeney—the man for whom he had done the slight favor that morning at the Providence station. McSweeney was a mighty power in the Tammany ranks!

But the boy's enthusiasm encountered a sudden check as he stood on the threshold of Farlahan's room. Oppenheim was there, and Farlahan was talking to him.

The chief political writer was a striking man to look upon; he was tall, soldierly, and keen, with a grizzled mustache clipped short, and a few scant gray locks that curled upon a lofty, wide forehead. His face revealed a nature that combined in rare measure the qualities of the amiable gentleman and the vigorous man of

affairs. No one could look on him and doubt that he possessed ability far above the common.

"There is absolutely no use of your going to Barney McSweeney," he was saying to Oppenheim. "I saw him myself an hour ago at the Corlears Café, and I could get nothing whatever out of him. He parried all my questions, as he knows how to do mighty well, and he laughed at me in his sleeve—no, not exactly that, for Barney always laughs in one's face when he doesn't want to talk. He wouldn't give us a line, Oppenheim, and it'd be worse than useless to go after him again. Our time is short, and we must work to the best advantage. Now here's the list of Tammany men I want you to see——"

Dent turned away and walked slowly to the elevator. Then he turned back a few steps, as if in doubt. Perhaps he ought to tell Farlahan, after all. No, he concluded, he wouldn't.

As he went down, he delved into one of his upper vest pockets and found McSweeney's card. He had carried it ever since his memorable Providence trip, for just such an emergency as this. As he glanced at it now, he recalled, with something of a thrill, what the man had said to him: "I won't forget you; depend on that!"

You know that in some things I'm 'on the inside.'"

Dent glanced up and down the Row for a taxicab. There was no question of expense in his mind now—only a question of haste. If he failed, he would pay the cab bill himself. He did have cash in his pocket now, for he had taken Hopson's advice, with the help of his mother and sisters. They had denied themselves so that he might do it. If he failed, it would be a stunning expense, but no matter! It was part of the game, and he would make the best of it. At all events, he must try to find McSweeney.

For a moment, his spirits went down. How could he hope to make the Tammany man talk, when Farlahan himself had failed? The folly of the effort was manifest.

A taxicab was coming up from Nassau Street, and he came near letting it go by; then he suddenly waved his arms wildly, and ran down the middle of Park Row toward the vehicle.

CHAPTER XIII

HUNTING A TAMMANY CHIEF

McSWEENEY lived on East Seventeenth Street, in one of the old-time brown-stone houses that are now all but swallowed up, in that section of New York, by modern business structures. In former days, the neighborhood of the politician's home had been quite aristocratic; indeed, the very house where McSweeney now lived had been occupied by one of the leading merchants of those days. Business reverses had overtaken him, and his estate had fallen into a tangle, so that ultimately McSweeney, always alert for a bargain, had bid the place in at a foreclosure sale and got it for a song. Here he had resided during the two decades or more in which he had been one of the rulers of Tammany Hall.

McSweeney, who loved nothing if not the society of his fellowmen, liked Seventeenth Street because it was convenient to his center of things. Perhaps there was not a man in the metropolis who had more friends than he or who

was a truer friend himself, or who loved his family more than McSweeney did. In a social way, and in his personal relations with those among whom he moved, the Tammany ruler was pure gold. His friends swore by him and doted on him; his wife and children worshipped him; even the dogs and cats of his neighborhood knew him to be the soul of kindness. But some of the newspapers—conspicuous among which was the *Sentinel*—said ugly things about McSweeney. That, of course, was the price he paid for being a political boss. The *Sentinel* had lambasted him for twenty years, three hundred and sixty-five days a year. If everything the newspapers said about him had been true, there was not paint enough in the world to color him as black as he was.

Outwardly, at least, McSweeney was not disturbed by this continual grilling. His skin was thick, and never once did he trouble himself to issue a formal denial, or to bring suit for libel, though perhaps he might have recovered millions of dollars, in the aggregate, in damages. So long had the press attacks gone unnoticed that the political writers and editorial sages had come to use McSweeney for a common butt. Whenever they lacked material for a lively roast or ironical

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editorial, they used the Tammany man, knowing they were safe.

All that they said, or any part of it, might have been true, for all Dent knew or cared. There was one vast difference now between Dent Lockwood and the other reporters who had seen or tried to see McSweeney that night. The others had gone as emissaries of his foes; he was going as a personal friend.

But the boy knew enough of politicians and their ways to feel certain that McSweeney would not be at home, late as the hour was. At a time when the very Tammany organization seemed to be threatened, according to the meager information the boy had gained at the *Sentinel* office, it was far more likely that the political leader would be hidden away somewhere in secret conference with his associates. But where would he be?

Farlahan had found him at the Corlears Hook Café, an all-night eating-house patronized largely by politicians who had plenty of money and who liked substantial and well-cooked fare. Strictly speaking, the name was something of a misnomer, for the café was not located on the exact site of the historic Hook, but on East Houston Street, not far away. That was in the heart of the East

Side and in the midst of one of McSweeney's strongholds.

But McSweeney had so many strongholds that to make the round of them, even if one knew where they all were, would have required more time than the boy had, even with a taxicab at his disposal.

Obviously, the first thing to do was to try the homestead on Seventeenth Street. Dent deemed it unwise to inquire over the telephone, so he was whisked up there in the cab.

A sixteen-story building overshadowed the old brown-stone house on one side and so darkened the steps that the boy did not see, until he had mounted them, that somebody else was there ahead of him.

"Hello, Lockwood!" a voice said to him as he paused in surprise. "You might as well turn around and go back. It's no use. I've been hammering here for twenty minutes. They've got the bell muffled, and all my racket here at the door hasn't had any effect. If the boss is home, he's turned a stony heart to us chaps."

Dent recognized the voice as belonging to a *Times* man.

"Well," he said, advancing, "I'll try a little hammering myself." Vigorously he pounded on

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the door, and listened, and pounded again. He pressed the button repeatedly, but could hear no jangle of a doorbell.

"You can't feaze them," reiterated the *Times* man. "They're used to this sort of thing; why, they've had it for twenty-five years, I suppose. They simply turn over and go to sleep after each hammering. This is the fourth time I've been here this evening, and I've got to keep coming every half hour until the forms close. Fine stunt, isn't it? We've got half a dozen other men, too, out after McSweeney; maybe they'll get him and maybe they won't. Let's go over to Chinatown and get something to eat. Have you tried Hip Lung's new-fashioned chop-suey?"

"No," returned Dent, "and I don't mean to, to-night. I've got work to do. Good-by——"

"Come along over to Mott Street!" urged the other. "That chop-suey——"

But Dent was in his taxicab, slamming the door. He was hungry, and would have been glad enough to accept the invitation, but great things were at stake. A fellow could eat any time, but there were some things he could not do more than once in a lifetime. As the cab rolled away he wandered if this night would prove to be a milestone in his career. It remained to be seen.

Not until he was well out of the other man's hearing did he countermand the order he had given to go back to the *Sentinel* office.

"Run up to the Corlears Café on Houston Street," he said, through the chauffeur's telephone. "Please go as fast as you can without getting us into trouble."

Whatever Dent did, he wished to do it independent of other newspaper men. If he should find McSweeney, he desired no audience of reporters. The *Sentinel* alone must have the story, were he fortunate enough to get one.

But at the café he was disappointed. McSweeney had left there an hour before, he was told. Half a dozen reporters had been after him since.

It was now well along toward one o'clock, and matters looked dubious. Once more he told the chauffeur to go to East Seventeenth Street. As the cab turned into that thoroughfare from Third Avenue another taxicab was just ahead. It drew up at the McSweeney home, and from it alighted Charity Brandon. She went briskly up the steps, and, as his own cab drew up, Dent heard her rapping the door lightly with her gloved knuckles.

"You'll have to knock louder than that,

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Charity," he said as he followed her up the stoop. "This way—— See!"

He gave the door a series of thumps that awoke the silence of Seventeenth Street. They stood listening, but nothing came of it. For a moment Dent imagined he heard somebody at an upper window, but when he looked up he could see no one.

"I did not expect to find you here, Charity," he observed. "So Farlahan caught you, after all!"

"No, it was Mr. Hopson who caught me," said the girl, laughing. "He thought perhaps McSweeney might talk to a girl, even if he wouldn't open his heart to the men. Farlahan is half crazy over this Tammany story. Is there a fire-escape I can climb, or can I go up on that high building next door and jump down on the roof?"

"We might tunnel into the basement," suggested Dent, laughing. But even if we got in McSweeney might not be home. You might as well go back to the office, Charity. And by the way, don't mention seeing me here! You know I wasn't assigned to this work. I'm supposed to be home and abed, like a good little boy—or a bad little boy! I'm here on my own account, and from the present outlook, I

imagine my salary for the month will go into this taxicab."

Charity entered her car reluctantly, and Dent was getting into his own, when still another taxicab came whirling up. This time a *World* man and a *Herald* man were together, and for five minutes they made a terrific racket on the door, while Dent and Charity sat awaiting a possible result. There was none.

The girl returned to the *Sentinel* office to report her failure, while Dent was whizzed away on a discouraging round of restaurants and clubs. He found many persons who had seen McSweeney that night, but for half an hour he discovered no one who could tell him where the big politician had gone. The boy was well versed in the night life of New York. He had been on the *Sentinel* staff nearly a year, and the difficult art of finding people had been one of his daily tasks. He knew well enough where to look.

It was a quarter past one when he struck his first tangible clew. McSweeney had gone not long before to the office of another Tammany man, a lawyer, in the Empire Building overlooking Trinity graveyard. This information was furnished him by a hotel elevator man, in exchange for a silver quarter thrust into his palm.

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Dent's loose change was shrinking alarmingly fast, and the prospects of settling the taxicab bill fairly staggered him.

The great Empire Building on lower Broadway showed a number of lights in its upper windows as the cab approached. The boy, with his head out of the door, anxiously ran his glance up and down the north wall, speculating as to which floor McSweeney might be on. The lights really indicated nothing, he knew, for the janitors were at work, or perhaps the calciminers and painters. In the daytime the Empire Building, like the other lofty structures about it, had business more important than the cleaning of walls and floors.

When he entered the lobby, he found a number of scrub-women at work on the tiling. A uniformed watchman challenged him. McSweeney? Yes, he had been there not long before, with one of the tenants. They had come down and gone.

"Where?" demanded Dent, breathlessly, disappointment showing bitterly in his face.

"Home," said the man. "Sure, he's gone home. Isn't it time for any honest man to be home, provided he doesn't earn his bread in the night, like myself? If you want McSweeney, you'll find him up on East Seventeenth Street."

The boy's spirits were at a very low ebb. He thought of that heavy oak door and the dark brown-stone front. All his efforts were foiled.

"Are you sure?" he asked, wearily. "Are you sure he's gone home?"

"Yes." The watchman politely accepted the half-dollar the boy apologetically proffered. Money, Dent had learned by experience, was the best and quickest way to get the world's assistance. "Yes, I saw him get into a cab out here in front, and his friend went down below to the subway. They said good-night. McSweeney told the driver to take him straight to Seventeenth Street."

This was conclusive enough for all practical purposes. Dent walked out into Broadway once more, where his cab was waiting. He stood for a minute ruminating. To go back to Seventeenth Street seemed the sheerest folly. Already his cab bill was prohibitive. True, he had run up taxicab accounts vastly larger, on many a night, but he had done it under orders from the *Sentinel*. Ten or twenty dollars never worried the *Sentinel* when it had work to be done. To get news, Hopson or Tompkins often incurred expense that would have seemed astounding to one not accustomed to the stupendous scheme of metro-

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politan journalism. Dent, quite familiar with it, had come to take such things for granted. But now he realized for the first time what it really meant.

From his pocket he took the reserve fund he had been carrying on Hopson's advice.

"How much?" he said to the chauffeur, trying to assume an air of lofty indifference.

The man put his finger on the meter.

"Seven dollars and a half," he said.

From his roll, Dent extracted a ten-dollar bill. He had two fives and a one-dollar bill left.

"Can't break it," complained the driver, squinting at the bill under the electric light.

"Can't you make the change yourself?"

The boy felt in his pockets. Only a few minor coins remained there.

"No," he returned; "I don't seem to have—"

Suddenly he paused, as his glance happened to rove across the street. For a moment he hesitated. Then he reached over and took back his ten-dollar bill. Rolling all his currency into a hasty wad, he thrust it into his pocket.

"Wait!" he said. "I think I'll need the taxi half an hour longer."

Before the chauffeur could answer, the boy had darted across the roadway to intercept a pedes-

trian who was going northward on the opposite sidewalk. It was not McSweeney, however. McSweeney was a giant, and this was the form of a lad who was not much more than a child.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RUSE

“**H**ELLO, there!” said Dent, as he reached the east curb of Broadway. “Wait—wait a minute! I want to talk to you!”

The younger boy paused. The electric rays from the street lamp fell on the gold trimming of a telegraph-messenger’s uniform. The boy was accustomed to the night streets, and showed no symptom of fear.

“Well,” he demanded, in a high-pitched voice, “what you want?”

“Where are you going?” Dent asked.

The lad sniffed in some disdain.

“What’s that to you?” he demanded.

“A good deal,” returned the other, mildly. “I want a boy to do some work for me. If you’re free, I’ll give you a dollar for half an hour.”

“Well, then,” said the messenger, appeased, “I’m goin’ home. I’m through for the night.” His tone suddenly became suspicious. “What you want me to do? Get into somebody’s window?”

"No," laughed Dent, assuringly; "nothing like that. I'm a *Sentinel* man." He displayed his newspaper badge. "I simply want you to deliver a message for me. Have you any blanks in your pocket?"

"Yep—a lot of 'em!" The lad took out a pad of the yellow sheets.

"Then come with me—if you want the dollar."

Together, they crossed the street to the taxicab.

"Get in," said Dent, opening the door for him. "I'll just run into the lobby of the Empire Building and scrawl a line or two. I'll be out in half a minute."

One of the great pillars in the rotunda of the skyscraper offered a projecting ledge near its base, and with this for a desk Dent wrote his message:

"*Mr. Barney McSweeney,*

"*Seventeenth Street,*

"*New York.*

"*I am the Sentinel man whom you met on the train. I want very much to see you to-night. You will find me waiting on your front steps.*

"DENT LOCKWOOD."

A minute later, the taxicab was flying northward in Broadway, with the two boys inside.

The messenger found a Western Union envelope in his pocket, and Dent wrote "Barney McSweeney" on it as well as he could in the swaying vehicle.

"You see," he explained, "I'm pressed for time to-night; otherwise I should send the message through the regular channel. But that's out of the question now. If I were to wait to do that, it might be daylight before the telegram got up there. By daylight the *Sentinel* will be on the streets, you know. This is a special emergency, and the time is getting short as it is."

He drew out his watch and held it to a light as the cab passed under.

"It's one thirty-three," he added. Then, through the chauffeur's 'phone, he spoke again: "Let her out all you can!"

For a minute he leaned back, with a sort of exultation. The strategy had come as an inspiration. Would it work? Would McSweeney come downstairs to receive a telegram, even if he refused to come down for the reporters? Well, he would know in a few minutes.

"Now see here," he said to the messenger, as the taxi slipped past the City Hall. "I'm going to let you out of the cab a block away from the house. I want you to walk the remainder of the

distance as fast as you can, and hammer on the door. You needn't bother with the bell, for it won't ring anyway. They've got it stuffed with cotton or something. Just pound on the door a minute, as a matter of form, for it isn't likely they'll open it. Then go back down on the sidewalk, where the light will fall on your uniform, and shout as loudly as you can: "Telegram! Oh, telegram!" till somebody comes. Do you understand?"

"Yep," assented the lad. "Yep, I got you!"

"If you get that message to McSweeney," Dent hastened to add, "I'll give you an extra dollar."

"That'll make two dollars in all," said the other, questioningly.

"Yes, two dollars. And say"—his breath came excitedly—"if this thing should pan out as I hope, I'll speak to Hopson about you, and maybe he'll give you five or ten more. Oh, I can't guarantee that he will ——— What's your name and address? Come around to the office tomorrow."

A policeman came out from some dark recess ahead and shouted a warning at the cabman, and for a minute the vehicle slowed down. But the chauffeur moved up his throttle and spark

again presently, and they turned out of Union Square into Seventeenth Street.

"Now," said Dent, into the driver's 'phone a minute later, "pull up and let this boy out."

The car stopped abruptly and the messenger leaped to the ground. Dent closed the door after him softly, but, suddenly remembering something very important, called him back.

"If you find any other reporters there," he said, warningly, "don't let them know that you came here with me. Remember!"

"What's the matter with you?" retorted the telegraph boy, disdainfully; "I wasn't born yesterday, was I? If I'm workin' for the *Sentinel*, I guess I know my business. Just watch me!"

In another minute the taxicab drew up for the third time that night before the quaint brown-stone house. To Dent's dismay, five vehicles stood there—three taxicabs, a hansom, and one four-wheeled horse-cab. It looked to him, as he emerged from his taxi, as if some sort of convention were being held on the McSweeney stoop. At least eight men were there; he wasn't sure how many more. At the moment, the rat-a-tat-tat on the front door sounded like a concert of snare-drums, with an occasional thump-thump as a bass accompaniment. Among the lot, Dent

recognized several reporters whom he knew very well.

The messenger-boy had just arrived. Obeying instructions implicitly, he was at the door, hammering. His contribution to the common disturbance was considerable.

"Come along, Lockwood!" somebody called. "Come along up and take your turn at it. McSweeney went in ten minutes ago."

"He went in like a clam," another voice said. "But we've got to hammer him out."

"We'll keep it up all night till he comes out and talks," put in a third.

Dent, however, still stood at the foot of the steps, watching the messenger. Presently the boy turned and came back to the sidewalk. Without bestowing a glance on his co-conspirator, he took up a position where the electric lamp on the corner shed its soft luster squarely over him. The braid on his coat and cap shimmered unmistakably. Then, turning his face up toward the dark windows, he cried, in his shrill treble:

"Telegram! Oh, telegram! Tel-e-gram Tel-e-gr-r-r-ram!"

"Let's see that telegram!" spoke up one of the men on the steps suddenly. "Here, kid, let's see it!"

The boy drew back.

"Get out!" he exclaimed, buttoning his coat, within which the message reposed.

"Tel-e-gr-r-r-ram!" he cried again.

Another of the men came down the steps.

"Let's have a look at it," he suggested. "Say, fellows," he added, turning to his companions, "shall we take it away from him?"

At this the boy squared himself for defense and looked instinctively at Dent. Then he shouted, with some alarm in his voice, and with tremendous energy and volume:

"Telegram! Hey, up there! I ain't goin' to stand here all night guardin' this message. If I lose it—— Hey! open up!"

The group of reporters gathered about him suddenly. They were rivals for news, all of them. Moreover, they were young men whose wits had been sharpened by many a strategy in the battle of news-gathering. The arrival of the messenger with a telegram, of itself a most natural occurrence, intuitively suggested to their acute instincts some ruse.

"Here—let's look at the envelope!" still another commanded. "Where'd you get it? Did you bring it from the telegraph office?"

"Get out!" cried the boy, squirming away from

the man who had laid hands on him. "Get out!" And again he shouted: "Telegram, I say! If you want it up there, you'd better get down here in a hurry!"

Somebody made a quick move, and the boy was a captive. He was such a little chap that no material expenditure of strength was required. He struggled and kicked, and screeched for McSweeney to come down and save his telegram. Valiantly did he defend that precious possession.

Then somebody else made a quick move. It was Dent Lockwood. With his shoulders down, in the same fashion he had lowered them the night he wedged his way through the strikers, he threw all his strength into the move and cleared the way instantly. For the moment, at least, the message was saved. With his breath coming fast, Dent faced his foes.

The trick, he knew, was now spoiled. These astute young men were not so easily fooled. No telegraph boy with a legitimate message ever stood in the street and bawled as if his life depended on it. Manifestly, this was trickery of some sort. The messenger had acted queerly from the beginning, and these rival reporters remembered that the boy and Dent Lockwood had arrived almost simultaneously.

It was useless for Dent to deny the strategy, now that he had openly come to the messenger's rescue. Nor could he hope to resist so many foes, should they make another attempt to get the telegram. That they would try to get it, he was sure. In war, desperate measures are justifiable, and this news-gathering was war, in earnest. These reporters would not stand idly by and permit one of them to gain McSweeney's attention through a sharp trick. His only hope lay in the quick appearance of McSweeney himself. Failing in that, he must either take these men into his confidence and share results with them, or throw up the whole game and go home.

The first alternative was galling; the second even more so. Still, he reflected, as he stood facing his rivals, he might better let all the newspapers in on the thing than to miss out himself.

"Fellows——" he began, but a noise at the door interrupted him. There was the rattle of a chain, the grating of a lock.

The group of men on the sidewalk turned quickly; but not so quickly as the messenger-boy. Like a flash, he dodged under the arms that were reached out to detain him, darted up the steps, and disappeared into the vestibule. A light flickered, and through a glass door those outside

saw the huge hulk of McSweeney, in a long red dressing-gown, as he tore open the telegram and read it.

A few seconds later the Tammany leader was in the open door.

"Come in, young man!" he said. "Come in — No! just Lockwood!"

Dent walked up the steps, scarcely daring to believe that it could really be true. There was a flurry among the group on the sidewalk, but no effort was made to prevent his passage. If McSweeney were really willing to talk to the *Sentinel*, it would be sheer folly to keep Lockwood from entering. Besides—the thought came to more than one of them craftily—they might get the story from him when he came out. Moreover, it all happened so suddenly that even the most experienced among them felt a queer awe toward this young chap who could walk so easily into the den of McSweeney—the enemy who had defied the New York newspapers during all his career.

What trick of legerdemain, these astonished men asked each other, had Lockwood put into that yellow envelope?

CHAPTER XV

THE WAY OUT

TEN minutes later McSweeney led Dent silently down into the basement, taking care that all the lights in the house were extinguished so that prying eyes could not by any chance see what was transpiring.

"Watch your steps, there!" he cautioned, in a whisper, as the boy tripped and would have fallen except for the bulk of humanity ahead. "Here, you put hand on my shoulder, and when I go down a step, you go down. That's right! Steady! Here we are at the bottom!"

With both hands on the politician's shoulders, Dent followed in lockstep through a dark passage-way. McSweeney fumbled at a door or two, and felt his way across a room, knocking over a chair with a crash.

"I reckon they'll hear that, all right," he chuckled. "Well, let 'em! They can't see us, anyway. Here we are at the back door."

"I hope none of those chaps are out here," said Dent, as his host unlocked the door and

opened it. Above the little court a star or two was twinkling. Lofty dark walls were all about them, and Dent could almost imagine he was looking out from the bottom of a well. "Sometimes," he added, with a doubtful laugh, "we newspaper men are a little too enterprising."

"No danger of that," assured McSweeney. "In the daytime they might come through one of these big buildings alongside us; some of 'em have done it before this, and got into the court. Not much good it did 'em, at that! Interviews don't come cheap, even at the back door. But at night there's no chance, for they can't get into the buildings. Don't worry, son, I'll get you out without one of 'em knowing it. They'll wait a long time if they stay in Seventeenth Street till you come out the front door!"

"But they'll keep you and your family awake the rest of the night," regretted Dent, following the other across the small area of cement.

"Awake?" McSweeney laughed in his low guffaw. "Why, I've slept to that tune so many years that I lie awake when the newspaper boys forget to come! Only last night my oldest girl says to me, says she: 'Dad, what is the matter with all the reporters? There hasn't been one around here for two nights. I'm just homesick

for them! I can't sleep, Dad. Can't you do something to stir up the newspapers again?"

"Well, you have done something, haven't you?" laughed Dent. "It isn't lonesome around Seventeenth Street to-night."

"No," agreed McSweeney, leading the way through a door he unbolted in a high brick wall at the rear of the court.

They passed into a passage between two buildings, so narrow that the two hundred and fifty pounds of the Tammany leader could scarcely navigate it. In a moment McSweeney rapped on a little door set deep into the blank wall of a building. Then a man's voice on the other side asked:

"That you, Barney?"

"Yes; open up, Nick; I've got a friend here who wants to get out; open up."

The door was thrown back, revealing the long gloomy corridor of an old-fashioned office building, and the comfortable figure of a night-watchman quite as old-fashioned.

"Reporters troublesome to-night?" he asked, as he admitted them. "I heard the racket over in Seventeenth. They need some buckshot, I reckon——"

"No, no!" chuckled McSweeney. "Those

boys are all right. They're noisy, Nick, but they're doing their duty, and I've got nothing against 'em. Mighty fine lot o' boys, most of 'em! But of course you understand how it is, Nick. There are times when it's best to keep my mouth shut; so I let 'em hammer."

Then to Dent, he went on: "I get out this way myself sometimes, when the front stoop is congested. It's a short cut to Sixteenth Street. If it wasn't for my good friend Nick, I couldn't get through; neither could you. Now go 'long; your time is short."

It was short, indeed. By the dim light of the corridor Dent looked at his watch. It lacked four minutes of two.

"I don't know how to thank you——" he began; but McSweeney cut him off.

"Don't stop for that," he said, holding out his brawny hand. He was still in his red dressing-gown, and it emphasized his hulk. "Come and see me again. I won't forget you!"

"And I'll not forget you," returned the boy, with some emotion, as he held the great hand for a moment. "You—you understand that I haven't control over the *Sentinel's* policy, and—and I can't control what they print about you. You understand——"

"Tut, tut!" said McSweeney. "I understand all that; and I don't care what they print."

"But I'll promise you one thing," Dent went on, with quick assurance; "I'll promise that the interview you've given me to-night will be written just as you've said it."

"Good-night!" said McSweeney. "Hustle along!"

"Good-night!"

Dent was off on the run. The night-watchman unlocked the outer door for him, and, with a quick glance up and down the deserted thoroughfare, he made his way rapidly to the Eighteenth Street station of the subway. Regretfully, he thought of the taxicab waiting for him over on the other street. The chauffeur would think him an impostor. But of course the man would come to the *Sentinel* office with his complaint, and would get his money instantly. There was comfort in that.

It was a quarter past two when he finally walked into the city room and presented himself to Tompkins. He had debated in his mind the advisability of going direct to Farlahan, but had deemed the plan unwise. He would not provoke Tompkins more than necessary.

Half a dozen men were at the typewriter-

desks, despite the lateness of the hour. Waterman was working like mad, and Oppenheim had just laid off his coat and seized some copy-paper. Putman and Scarsdale and two or three other men who had been out on the round-up of politicians were finishing their interviews. What sort of story the *Sentinel* had on the Tammany split, Dent could only guess. Of one thing he was sure. *He* was the only man who had the story direct from headquarters.

"Mr. Tompkins," he said, when he had waited a few seconds for the other to look up from his desk, "Mr. Tompkins, I found McSweeney."

CHAPTER XVI

THE BOX STORY

TOMPKINS dropped the galley-proof he had been reading, and straightened suddenly.

At the copy-readers' table near-by there was a cessation of work as the men looked at Dent. Farlahan, coming in at the moment, heard the boy's words and stopped short.

"What's that you say?" Tompkins demanded.

"I found McSweeney and talked with him," repeated Dent. "I've got the story of the Tammany split."

Tompkins gazed at the boy a moment in blank amazement. Then he looked at Farlahan and back at Dent.

"What nonsense are you trying to give me?" he asked. "Who sent you out on the Tammany story?"

"I went without being sent," the boy answered. His face was flushed and his eyes bright, but he showed a trace of defiance. "I went because I thought I could get the story—and I did get it!"

The night city editor measured him with an

unbelieving glance. Some trick, he imagined, had been perpetrated on the cub reporter. Such incidents were not uncommon. Tompkins smiled in a sarcastic way.

"Would you know McSweeney if you were to see him?" he asked, and his tone added to the insult.

The look that flashed from the boy's eyes would have withered Tompkins if it could. Then, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, he turned away.

"I don't think I care to argue that point," he observed, as he went. "I'm off duty; I think I'll go along home."

He was half-way to the door when Farlahan called to him to come back. Rather doubtfully, he obeyed.

"When did you see McSweeney?" asked the political man.

Dent consulted his watch.

"Twenty minutes ago."

"Where?" Farlahan was quick and incisive.

"At his house." Dent could be quite as short.

"Impossible!" Farlahan's exclamation was seconded by a gruff question from Tompkins: "What's the matter with you, Lockwood? What are you trying to give us?"

Dent faced them both in a sudden resolution. For the first time in his career, he had the best of Tompkins, and he would hold his ground. It was a long lane that had no turning.

"If it's impossible, as you say, then there is no use discussing it," he said to Farlahan, and then to Tompkins: "I'm sorry you imagine there's something the matter with me, but I hardly think that's worth discussing, either. Unless you have work for me to do, I'll go along home."

"Wait!" called Farlahan, as the boy turned to go again. "Wait! What about McSweeney?"

"Nothing!" said Dent, quietly. "I've said all I mean to say—unless Tompkins withdraws his charge against me."

Tompkins opened his eyes in amazement. He had never heard the cub reporter talk like this.

"What charge?" he asked, roughly.

"The charge that I am a fool. You've made a fool of me long enough, Tompkins, and I'm through with it, and I'm through with you—unless you treat me on a par with the other men of the office."

"You *are* a fool!" exclaimed Tompkins, hotly. "If you've really seen McSweeney, it's your duty to say so. Only be sure that it *was* McSweeney."

"I've already said so," returned Dent, doggedly.

"Then tell us about it—what is there to it?" Tompkins' eyes were vicious.

For a few seconds Dent stood looking him squarely in the face, the color fading out of his own. Two strong characters had at last met in conflict, and the boy's was the cooler and firmer of the two.

"I'll never explain," he said, in low but final accents, "until you withdraw that accusation. There are other papers in New York that I can work for. I rather think I'm through with the *Sentinel*."

"Come, come!" broke in Farlahan. "We're losing valuable time! See here, Tompkins!"—he turned to his associate deprecatingly—"tell the boy you had no intention of slighting him! Quick! What is there to this affair, Lockwood? What is it you know?"

"I'm willing to give you the story," Dent answered, "if Tompkins will treat me fair and square; I'm through with his bulldozing. I've been on the *Sentinel* staff almost a year, Mr. Farlahan, and Tompkins has checkmated every effort I've made to accomplish things. Hopson would have given me a show, but Tompkins

always upsets whatever I do. If Hopson assigns me to a good story, Tompkins throws it on the floor after I've written it. If there's anything to be killed out of the proofs, Tompkins always picks out my stuff to kill. If he has good assignments to give out, he goes around me and gives them to the other fellows. He keeps me writing obituaries, and little stories that can't get more than two-line heads on the inside. During the year that I've been here, I've never once had a first-page story. It isn't because I'm incompetent, Mr. Farlahan! I know that well enough. Hereafter, if I stay on the *Sentinel*, I mean to have an equal chance with the rest of the fellows!"

Dent had come into his own at last. He had risen above the cub reporter, and taken matters into his own hands. He had served his apprenticeship—a bitter one, at that! Thereafter, Tompkins must know him as a man, not a child.

"It's not that I want to put myself forward, Mr. Farlahan," he went on, after pausing a second to get his breath. "I'd have been willing to go on for a while longer as a cub if Tompkins had given me a fair show. I'm not above doing the little assignments and the routine, but I mean

to have a chance for advancement. If Tompkins won't give it to me, I'll go somewhere else to get it. It's not that I want to make myself out a star, Mr. Farlahan, but some day I'm going to be one, and I mean to get into training. Besides, I don't mean to let Tompkins or anybody else call me a fool any longer. I'm through——"

"Tompkins, you ought to apologize!" broke in Farlahan. "The boy is right! Now, see here, Lockwood! if you've got anything from McSweeney——"

"Good-night!" said Dent, with forced politeness, and once more turned away. Every man in the room was watching him now. All the typewriters were silent, and at the copy-desk the unread pages lay waiting, although the minutes were crowding. Up in the composing-room the foreman was clamoring for the rest of the Tammany interviews, and the metal for the plates was bubbling hot in the stereotyping department. Far down in the basement the monster presses stood ready for the touch that would let loose their thunder. All the tense activities of the night were fast drawing to their taut climax. The one great piece of news of the day rested in Dent's possession, and in his alone. The political sensation of the year was his property—the spectacular

split in Tammany! He knew its innermost history—and Tompkins had called him a fool!

All the boy's wrongs flashed through his brain as he turned away after his passionate outburst; all the humiliations and insults Tompkins had heaped upon him; all his struggles to accomplish things for the *Sentinel*, and for himself, and for his mother and sisters; all his ambitions. He had made mistakes, and encountered failures, he knew, but he had never shirked duty, however hard and disagreeable. He had done some good work, too; he knew it. He had done a few really big things! Well, he was through with it all; he was through with the *Sentinel*. But he was not through with his calling! No, he was just beginning! Some day, and before many years, too, the *Sentinel* would regret—

“O Lockwood!”

It was Tompkins' voice that spoke. Something in the man's tone caused the boy to stop abruptly. The accent was different from any Tompkins had used toward him in the past. There was no note of command in it, no taint of the bully. Instead, it was almost servile.

“Don't do anything rash about resigning,” said Tompkins. “I withdraw my remarks. Tell Farlahan what you've got from McSweeney.”

Dent felt the tingling of victory in his veins. He had Tompkins in a tight corner, and the latter had taken the only possible course to get out. It would never do, the man knew perfectly well, to let even the cub reporter walk out of the office with the Tammany story in his pocket. His own downfall, Tompkins knew, would be accomplished were he to exhibit such woful inability to handle his men.

"Very well, sir," said Dent, hesitating a moment. Tompkins' apology had been rather scant. Still it was something else that caused him to pause. He turned to Farlahan.

"There is only one other condition," he said. "I promised McSweeney that whatever else the *Sentinel* might say about him, his interview, as he gave it to me, should be absolutely literal. I have it here in my pocket"—he took out his wadded copy-paper—"exactly as he worded it. I took it down carefully and read it back to him."

"Then we'll print it just as he said it," agreed Farlahan, with a glance at the clock. "Quick—out with it!"

In a few words, Dent related the incidents of the night, jumping back for a moment to the Providence trip. It had all come out of that seeming disaster, he said. From a wretched little

failure had leaped, in the most amazing manner, this great story. Never again would he take a misfortune so much to heart. The most brilliant success might lie hidden in a catastrophe.

The clock indicated two-thirty when he sat down at the nearest typewriter-desk and began the transcription of his abbreviated notes. Tompkins himself took the pages and carried them to the copy-desk, after Farlahan had read them over his shoulder. The speed of the wind seemed to be in Dent's fingers.

It was not a long interview, and he finished it inside of ten minutes. Before the last page was out of his machine, Farlahan himself was at work at the adjoining desk. The Tammany story had been given a new aspect, and a wholly different lead was required. For the first time in history, McSweeney had made public some of the innermost secrets of his organization. Farlahan had only five minutes in which to switch the trend of his original opening, but five minutes may mean extraordinary things.

In the composing-room each second was harnessed to the task of re-making the Tammany story. Dent's copy, as well as Farlahan's, was scattered among the linotype machines in apparently hopeless disintegration; but it came back

again to the starting-point with the precision of a system as relentless as the linotypes themselves. At the make-up tables men snatched out chunks of type-bars here and there from the page-forms, and thrust in other chunks. They crowded down some of the lines, shoved up others, took out whole stories and relegated them to inside pages, and shifted the make-up in the most amazing manner. To an outsider, it would have seemed that the *Sentinel* must surely appear on the streets next morning as a confused and meaningless mixture of type.

But it did not. On the contrary, Tompkins remarked, when one of the damp copies from the presses was sent up to him in the pneumatic tube, that the first page was the prettiest yet.

To Dent, who had waited to see the result of his triumph, the first page meant something far greater. The McSweeney interview was printed in the form of a "box," in ten-point type, with a border. It loomed as the most conspicuous feature of the front page. Indeed, Dent saw nothing else.

CHAPTER XVII

READING TELEGRAPH COPY

LOCKWOOD," said Tompkins, one evening not long after the McSweeney affair, "Grimes wants a man to read telegraph copy to-night. One of his copy-readers has been called home, and he's short. Get over there and see what you can do."

Dent looked up from his desk in some amazement. Tompkins had paused there to give this assignment, and there was an ugly half-leer on the man's face as he squinted down at the boy.

"Why, I—I never read copy!" said Dent, his eyes troubled. "I—I'm afraid I'd make a muddle of it."

Something really diabolical came into Tompkins' face.

"You'll never learn any younger," he said. "You're the man, I believe, who insists on having a chance!"

The color rose in the boy's cheeks. He made no reply at the moment, but, letting down the

folding shelf of his typewriter-desk and briskly clearing away some scattered papers, he arose.

"Very well, sir," he said; "I'll do the best I can at it."

Tompkins had adopted a new policy. Since the night of the Tammany story, he had been getting revenge in a way even more disagreeable to the boy than his former methods. Now, instead of giving Dent insignificant things to do, he gave him difficult work. Dent was still the cub, but Tompkins never lost an opportunity to saddle him with a man's task. It was evident to the boy that the McSweeney episode was likely to result disastrously, after all. Moreover, Tompkins was safe himself; he had the excuse that he was merely giving Dent the "show" he had demanded.

So Dent now walked down the corridor to the telegraph room with much misgiving. This was a department of the newspaper that had been almost an unexplored field to him. A New York boy as he was, and trained from the first in the city room, he had come to consider local news as the one important feature of journalistic enterprise. Of course he knew that telegraph news was often played up, and that frequently it got more space and better positions in the paper than

home affairs, but he had a half impression that this was because the news editor—who was over both Hopson and Tompkins, and over the telegraph editor, as well—had been trained chiefly in the telegraph department, and therefore was prejudiced in its favor. Then, too, the news editor—who preferred this title to the more ordinary one of night editor—had absolute control of the make-up. He dictated which stories should go on the first page, and which should be relegated to the inside. He scheduled the space left vacant by the advertising columns, and allotted it as he saw fit to the city editor and the telegraph editor. There was always more or less conflict between the two departments, and, at times, open jealousy. When questions arose as to what news must be sacrificed for lack of space, it was the news editor who umpired the point. Usually there was no appeal, for such questions almost always arose very late at night, when the managing editor was home and asleep. De Camp, the news editor, was an autocrat over autocrats.

Dent opened the door bearing the black legend "Telegraph Room," and went in, his heart beating uncomfortably fast. This was a new world, where things moved in new grooves

and where the inhabitants were of a different species. Indeed, Dent knew very few of them at all. He had looked down, unconsciously, upon the telegraph men, and felt rather sorry for them, but now a sudden respect took hold of him. The telegraph room, after all, was of considerable consequence. With something like chagrin over his ignorance, and resentment toward Tompkins for thrusting him without any preparation into unknown regions, he walked across the room to the desk of Grimes, the telegraph editor.

"Mr. Tompkins told me to report to you, sir, to read copy," he said.

Grimes was still a young man, but long service under electric lights had given him a washed-out, unhealthy look. For ten years he had not seen much daylight. In the winter time he scarcely saw the sun for weeks at a stretch. When the sun shone, he slept, and when New York's evening multitudes were homeward bound after the day's toil, Grimes was just coming downtown for the night. He and Tompkins, in this respect, worked under similar conditions, and, as in Tompkins' case, the reversal of the natural order had not improved his temper. In fact, he and Tompkins were enemies of a rather spectacular sort. They clashed over matters of space some-

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times in a manner that awoke the midnight echoes of the seventeenth floor. What they said to each other would not have improved the reputation of either had the printers put it into the *Sentinel*. Tompkins, like Dent himself, believed in local news; Grimes would have wiped New York off the slate altogether had it not been for the unfortunate presence of De Camp.

Grimes was thin and hook-nosed, and had a sharp, nasal voice. Now he looked up at the newcomer, something like surprise showing in his face. He had called on the city room for a copy-reader, not a boy. Dent saw the look and added:

"I'm the only one he could spare."

Grimes made a remark or two not at all complimentary to Tompkins. "What's your name?" he asked Dent. The two had never been introduced, although they had encountered each other at various times about the corridors or in the city room, where Grimes had occasion to go at intervals.

"Lockwood," the boy told him.

"Lockwood—yes, I remember! You've had a telegraph story or two, haven't you?"

"Yes, quite a number. One was the East Fork story——"

"Are you good at writing heads?" Grimes demanded.

"I—I don't know." Dent was truthful. "I never wrote one."

Grimes' jaw dropped. Then he made another remark about Tompkins. He seized the telephone from his desk and snapped at the office operator downstairs: "Put Tompkins on!"

"See here, Tompkins," he expostulated, when he heard the big fellow's voice at the other end, "what sort of deal are you giving me to-night? I asked for a copy-reader! . . . What's that? Why, he says he never wrote a head in his life! . . . Give him a show? Now, see here, Tompkins, I'm not teaching the primary class. I— . . . Oh, I know! He may be a good man, and all that; he may be able to write, but that doesn't signify that he can read copy. You know that, yourself! And say, I'm in a bad hole to-night. I was short two men on the copy-desk before Mulligan went home—— . . . What? . . . Can't you send Rhinelander? I've had him before, you know . . . Out on assignment, eh? Well, how about Maxwell, or Scarsdale? Busy, eh? . . . Say, Tompkins, you're a fatheaded blot on the face of the universe. Good-night!"

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He uttered the final adieu in a sharp crescendo, and hung up the receiver with a bang.

"Come along!" he said to the unhappy Dent, who had stood listening to the near end of the conversation with mingled emotions. In the first place, it was clear that Tompkins had sent him there to annoy his enemy Grimes. In the second place, it was just as evident that Tompkins was also venting his spite on Dent himself. It was seldom Tompkins had opportunity for such double-linked vengeance.

"Come along!" repeated Grimes, and he led the boy to the copy-table, where three or four men were already at work.

"Here's a man to help for to-night," he said brusquely, to Larrabee, the head copy-editor at the telegraph desk. Dent knew Larrabee by name and sight only. "You'll have to make the best of him," Grimes added, and stalked away.

With this scant and discouraging introduction, Dent sank into a chair and looked hopelessly at Larrabee. The latter, being engaged for a minute on the final pages of a dispatch from New Orleans, merely grunted.

Dent had a little time, therefore, to glance about him. It was a large room—almost as large as the city room. In few respects, other

than size, were the two similar. This room had all the appearances of being a great telegraph office. Rows of operating desks extended nearly the length of it, each with its fast-clicking receiver elevated on a little stand—and enclosed on all sides but one by a wooden box—that brought it close to the operator's ear. On each desk was a typewriter, and the commingled clatter made a medley of noise that was dissonant, yet paradoxically harmonious. Even with the sounding-boxes close to their ears, Dent could not understand how the telegraph operators could read the messages that came, in their swift code, from every part of the nation. To him, the racket was merely a steady rumble, on a different key from the noise of the city below, but quite as meaningless.

As in the city room, a maze of green-shaded electric lights made the desks bright, while the upper reaches of the apartment were in gloom. From the center of the copy-table at which he sat rose a huge brass pipe, until it touched the ceiling; then it curled itself over to the side of the room and ran along the wall to the other end, whence it disappeared mysteriously through the ceiling itself. This was the pneumatic tube through which the finished copy was shot with

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the rapidity of compressed-air to the composing-room above. Its lower end, at the copy-table, terminated in a gaping brass receptacle that hissed impatiently and insatiably for copy. The pneumatic tube—which had its counterpart in the city room—was the link connecting the brain-workers below with the linotype machines that transformed the mental output into type.

Grimes' desk was just back of the copy-table, and, like it, was a bare, flat-topped affair with no unnecessary equipment or furbelows. It had a telephone, a large inkstand, a pastepot as big as a gravy-dish, and a huge pair of scissors that had a habit of snipping things as viciously as Grimes snapped at people.

Just beyond, was the desk of the cable man, who was also Grimes' assistant, and, in the corner, a bench for a couple of plebian-looking copy-boys, who sprang at the command of Grimes or his aids, and performed sundry missions to and from the city room, composing-room, or the other editorial departments.

Just now, however, the copy-table itself held the greatest interest for Dent. It was long and rather narrow, and divided into stalls by low wooden partitions, so that each man who worked at it might keep his papers, ink and paste from

undue familiarity with those of his neighbors. Sometimes, it is true, a long, venturesome arm would reach over a partition and extract a paste-pot or scissors, and thus bring about momentary anarchy, but as a rule the slavery of these telegraph copy-readers was too abject to permit of such diversions. Dent observed, as he waited for orders from Larrabee, that these men were working quite up to the limit of speed. The telegraph news of the world was being piled upon their shoulders to edit and put in presentable shape; each story had to be duly headed and sub-headed and slugged for the printers. One of the readers was a tall giant with a big nose; another a little fellow with a pug; a third a ponderous man with gray whiskers. All were coatless and vestless and collarless, for the night was warm. Dent was watching them apprehensively when Larrabee spoke to him:

"Here," he said, "put a four-head on this Chicago bank yarn, and trim it to six hundred words. Indent the first quote and run in the table."

With these brisk instructions, he dropped several typewritten pages into Dent's stall, and turned away.

Dent rubbed his chin dubiously, looked in



" 'HERE, PUT A FOUR-HEAD ON THIS CHICAGO BANK YARN.' "—Page 188

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hesitation at Larrabee, on the other side of the table, and then leaned toward the bewhiskered copy-reader at his right and inquired, in a half whisper:

"What's a four-head?"

The man paused, in the act of swiping his paste-brush across a sheet of copy he had dismembered.

"Where'd *you* come from?" he asked, without making any special secret of it. Then he added, with some intention of being obliging:

"Top line twenty-one letters and spaces, unless you've got several L's and M's; first pyramid five or six ordinary words; second line about twenty-four letters and spaces; second pyramid ten words."

Dent hesitated.

"Thanks!" he returned, after a moment. "How—how many letters did you say——"

The man opened a drawer and took out a piece of cardboard, on which were pasted samples of the various heads used on the *Sentinel*. He passed it over to Dent without comment, and went on with his work.

With a sigh of relief, the boy bent over the Chicago dispatch and commenced to read it, carefully following it through with his pen and

correcting typographical errors and faults of construction. There were several sentences that did not please him, and he polished them up, and finally clipped out one paragraph entirely with his shears and rewrote it on a sheet of copy-paper, in ink, pasting it into its proper sequence in the story. On the whole, he imagined he was doing rather well for a green hand. Perhaps, after all, it wouldn't be any great trick.

However, when he had finished the editing and was ready to write the head, the thing began to take on a different aspect. He tried several lines, but they were all too short. "CHICAGO BANKS MERGE" looked well, he thought, but there were only nineteen letters and spaces. He tried "CHICAGO BANKS UNITE" and counted the letters and blanks with hopefulness. His spirits sank, for here, too, were only nineteen.

Just then Larrabee reached over and seized his copy.

"Has this been read?" he asked.

"Yes," said Dent, in some dismay, "but the head isn't finished."

"Get the head up as quick as you can," the other commanded. Then he wrote "Head to come" on the first page of the dispatch, jammed the copy into one of the leather pouches, and

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sent it whirring off through the pneumatic tubes to the composing-room.

Once more Dent gave his attention to his prospective head. After some thought, he wrote "BANKS IN CHICAGO MERGE," but on making his count he found that he had one letter more than the schedule allowed. Then he tried "CHICAGO INSTITUTIONS JOIN," but this was away over. Besides, he didn't like the way it looked. Somehow, he must get the word "BANKS" into the head. He experimented with "BIG BANKS MERGE," but this was hopelessly short. "BIG BANKS MERGE IN CHICAGO" was hopelessly long.

"Come along with that Chicago bank head!" said Larrabee, in business-like brusqueness. "Rush it along—— What'd you say your name was?"

"Lockwood." Dent was perspiring freely. "I—I'll have the head in a minute, I guess."

He returned to the attack, but the puzzle was exciting him. He wished both Tompkins and Grimes far down in the sea. He rubbed his chin, and then wrote: "CHICAGO BANKS FUSE." Only eighteen letters and spaces! Well, he would try "CHICAGO BANKS IN FUSION." No, that was too long.

In despair, he let the top line go for the moment,

and proceeded to do the first pyramid. That was comparatively easy: "Three Financial Concerns Unite Forces" looked all right. But the second display-line was another stickler. He had tried a dozen combinations of words, when Larrabee's 'phone rang.

"Where's that Chicago bank head?" came the message over the wire. Dent could hear the incisive question even where he sat. He recognized the voice of the composing-room foreman.

"Where's that Chicago bank head?" demanded Larrabee, turning to Dent as he still held the receiver.

"Nearly finished," returned Dent, rather faintly. "Coming along in a minute!"

"Coming along in a minute!" bawled Larrabee into the transmitter; then he hung up the receiver and fell to sorting some copy. Dent was still struggling with the second line. Presently he skipped this, too, and proceeded to the second pyramid. He had just written it to suit him when Larrabee reached over once more and seized his copy.

"What's the matter with this head?" he asked.

"I—I don't know," said Dent, panting. "I—" He stopped, for Larrabee, with a swoop of

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his pencil, was crossing off the top line: "CHICAGO BANKS IN FUSION." In its place he wrote, without seeming to count anything at all: "BIG BANKS CONSOLIDATE." And, as Dent made the count himself, he discovered the number of letters and spaces to be exactly right. Then Larrabee remodeled and completed the rest of the head, with the same swift skill, and jammed it into the tube.

"Here," he said, tossing another batch of copy to the beginner; "read that for a 'junk'—and please take more pains to make your heads conform."

Chagrined and heartsick at his own incompetence, Dent worked away desperately, inquiring in rather pitiable tones the meaning of a "junk-head." His bewhiskered friend told him, and he got it done before Larrabee called for it. But presently the pneumatic tube gave vent to a loud and disgusted hiss, and back came the junk-head from upstairs, labeled in bold blue letters: "Too long."

"Here, Lockwood, fix this up," said Larrabee, dropping the rejected copy into the boy's stall. "And say! I told you to indent the first quote of that bank story, and to run in the table. What's the matter with you?"

There was a mist before Dent's eyes and he felt just a bit giddy. Tompkins was getting his revenge, indeed!

CHAPTER XVIII

UNEXPECTED TRAGEDY

LATE that night Dent went home, utterly crushed and worn. Never in all his year on the *Sentinel* had he undergone such torture as this one evening on the copy-desk had brought him. Many a time he had watched the copy-readers in the city room, and the thing had looked as easy as clock-work. The heads had slipped from their pens as smoothly as water over a stone, and even when things were crowding they had found time to roll cigarettes and pass a joke now and then. Jokes! Dent felt as if he never wanted to joke again. The tragedy of the copy-desk had hold of him.

And yet the work had come easier along toward the close; he was aware of that. The bewhiskered man on one side and the hawk-nosed chap on the other had thawed out a little, and helped him over some rough spots, and even Larrabee had limbered up toward midnight and tossed him an apple. Only four of his heads had come back for revision, and only one head in the proof had

drawn the censorship of Grimes. "Who wrote that gem?" the telegraph editor had demanded, in nasal sarcasm, and Dent had been obliged to confess.

Well, it was over, and he had lived through it, he thought, as he helped himself to a glass of milk from the ice-chest at home, and then went up to bed. Perhaps, after all, he had done as well at copy-reading as any greenhorn could. But no more of it for him! He would stick to the city room. The thought of being chained to that dry, uninteresting telegraph desk made him shudder. Things didn't happen in the telegraph room, he reflected; at least, not the sort of things that enlivened the city room and made it a place of fascination and action. The news of the telegraph room was often stirring enough, he knew, but the men who gathered it were not Grimes' men. Grimes' men were all slaves, who moved at the crack of his whip. Ah! the crack of Larrabee's whip was still smarting! Yet Larrabee had been decent enough, after all. It was not so much Larrabee, or Grimes, as it was the telegraph room itself. It was *news* Dent wanted to gather, real news. How could there be any doing and daring in the telegraph room? he asked himself. Dent meant to get out in the

world and conquer things; not sit at a copy-desk and count the letters and spaces in heads.

Great was the boy's consternation, then, when Tompkins said to him the next night: "Get over into the telegraph room, Lockwood. Grimes wants you again."

Grimes was more nasal than usual, but he was not quite so short in his speech.

"Lockwood," he said, with happy assurance, "I've put you on my payroll; you've been transferred to me from the city room, and I want you to read copy in Mulligan's place. His wife's sick and he's got to leave town with her. He's quit, and I've given you the job."

Dent stood in mute dismay.

"Who—who transferred me?" he asked. He seemed to have very little breath for the question.

"I asked for you," admitted Grimes, with a crafty smile. "I hope you appreciate the compliment."

"I—I do," hesitated the boy. "I do; but——"

"You did very well last night," the telegraph editor went on. "Of course, you were green, but you showed that you had the foundation, and that's important. A lot of chaps come up here looking for jobs on the desk who fall down on the simplest head we've got. Its a knack; I imagine

you've discovered that, already. Well, I believe you've got the knack, Lockwood, and Larrabee will beat it out of you somehow. He has the faculty for developing copy-readers. In a week or two you'll find that the heads come without a great deal of effort. In a year you may be at the top of the desk—one never can tell."

"Did—did Hopson agree to this?" faltered Dent.

"Hopson? Why Hopson left to-night for his vacation. But of course *he* won't care. He's always glad to see one of his men given a show. You'll get more money, you know. How much have you been getting?"

"Fifteen a week," said Dent. "Of course you know I'm only—only a cub reporter."

"Oh, yes; but that's all right, Lockwood." Grimes was patronizing. "We've all been cubs at some time or another. For a while, of course you'll have to rank as a cub copy-reader, but I can make your salary twenty dollars to start. That's good money for a boy of your age."

Dent looked at the floor, and then out over the maze of green globes. It was not long after the supper hour, but the clatter of telegraph instruments and typewriters was well under sway. Then he glanced over to the copy-desk. Larrabee

was dealing out a batch of typewritten matter to the hawk-nosed man, who was discarding his collar for the night's rush. This tragedy had taken him absolutely by surprise. Never had a thing knocked him so hard. After all, he was chained to this green-eyed prison—perhaps for life! The thought of it almost overwhelmed him.

And yet, through the hopelessness of it, came the thought of his mother and sisters. Twenty dollars a week! What a munificent salary it seemed. They needed the money at home. They had proudly predicted that some day he would rise—and now he had risen! Could he go home and tell his mother he had refused the advancement; that he had turned down twenty dollars a week?

Tompkins' revenge seemed complete.

"All right!" Dent said, rather shortly. "I appreciate your good opinion of me, Mr. Grimes, and I—I'm sure I'll try to deserve it. I had no idea I was cut out for a copy-reader, and I— Well, to be frank, I'd rather stay in the city room. But I—I'll do the best I can——"

He was about to say "do the best I can, for the sake of my mother and sisters," but he caught the final phrase before it escaped him.

"Oh, you'll get over that feeling." Grimes

assured him; "I was in the city room once, and I can tell you I'm mighty glad I got out of it. "It's a strenuous gait, boy; it's the pace that takes the best that's in a man, and leaves him nothing."

"I know it," said Dent, with a quaver which he tried to conceal in a cough; "that's why I like it. I want to give it the best that's in me. I think every man ought to be in some work that he can give his best—his very best. But——"

"Well, I think you'll make a good copy-reader, Lockwood," consoled Grimes, who was not a bad sort of chap at heart. "You'll do well with us here, and you'll get more money—a whole lot more—if you stick. You'll be better off in the telegraph room, too; you'll have regular hours, and steady diet, and your afternoons off for the ball-game in summer or the show in winter. You'll work from six to two, or thereabouts, with the late watch once a week. You won't have much excitement, true, but when you get used to it you'll like the telegraph room all the better because it's peaceful. You'll get no rush assignments out of town at three A. M.; no zero fires at midnight; no mysteries; no blood, no——"

"Hello, Lockwood!" broke in Larrabee, coming

up at the moment. "There's a San Francisco yarn waiting for you. It'll carry a Giant head. That's next to a Jumbo, you know. Hustle it through if you can, for we'll be rushed later on."

Dent walked to his place at the copy-desk and took off his coat. There was something that insisted on blurring his eyes, but he succeeded in brushing it away, and not long afterward he was busily counting the letters and spaces in the Giant head he was writing.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GONG IN THE CITY ROOM

IT was a sweltering night in August. A sweltering night on the streets meant even more than that up in the telegraph room. This department of the *Sentinel* was housed on the inner side of the seventeenth floor, and its windows opened upon a court. Unlike the city room, it enjoyed no outlook over City Hall Park. And now, hot as the night was in the city room, the temperature there was quite agreeable compared to the terrible heat of the telegraph room.

Moreover, the city room was almost deserted, while its neighbor down the corridor was peopled with its customary staff of telegraph operators, copy-readers, editors, and copy-boys. The heat made no difference whatever in the news that was clicking over the wires. It came from cold climes as well as hot. Few of the men who were gathering and sending it had ever seen New York, and had no particular interest in the weather there.

Out in Seattle somebody was describing,

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through several thousand miles of copper, the arrival of the Presidential party on Puget Sound shores. The night was chilly out there, the dispatch said, and the President was wearing his overcoat. When Larrabee received the final sheet of the story from the operator, it was signed: "WATERMAN." He tossed the page over to Dent, who was reading copy on the story. "We'll have to cut Waterman's stuff to two columns," he said. "He always runs 'way over. Take out some big chunks when you get the proofs, Lockwood."

In New Orleans somebody else was telling the *Sentinel* about the yellow fever. Even down there the temperature was pleasant, but the story itself was blood-curdling. The hawk-nosed man was handling this copy, and Larrabee dealt the pages out to him, observing: "Here, 'Hawk,' cut out some of the horrors; that New Orleans chap seems to think we're strong on ghastly adjectives. Tone it down all you can."

In Buenos Aires the *Sentinel* correspondent was elucidating matters pertaining to the political crisis of Argentina, and his essay-like message was traveling under the seas to Grimes, whence it came to Larrabee, who handed it over to Dent's right-hand neighbor with the remark: "Put a

little life into it if you can, 'Whiskers'; you know that fellow down there is half asleep all the time. I wonder if it's hot or cold in Buenos Aires; he forgot to say."

From London was coming a profound analysis of the Liberal party; also a dignified statement of the railroad strike situation, taken from the proofs of the London *Times*; also the arrival of prominent Americans; also sundry other news-stories for Grimes to send by copy-boy to Larrabee, and for Larrabee to distribute to the slaves under him.

Then there was a dispatch from Hong Kong; another from Rome another telling of the critical situation at Constantinople. These three Larrabee passed to the little chap next to him. "Keep them short 'Pug,' he decreed; "We're going to be badly jammed to-night."

From nearer home a column story was ticking over the wire from Charity Brandon. It was dated at Newport, and related the doings of society in hot weather, as viewed by the gently humorous eyes of the young woman reporter. "That girl is a wonder," commented Larrabee, as he put the copy on Dent's section of the desk.

The boy worked fast, but his heart was heavy. The world was big and full of stirring affairs.

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All over the globe newspaper men were out doing things, fighting the news-battle, achieving their triumphs, or perhaps meeting defeats. At all events, they were in action. *He* was merely reflecting their energies and their glories. It was like being a soldier detailed on guard duty at home when the war was waging fiercely abroad. He longed to be out and in it. This was not the life that suited his ambitions or his impulses.

But—and the thought gave him melancholy pleasure—he was getting twenty dollars a week! His mother and sisters could have a few more of the things they needed so much; the old Long Island homestead could have a coat of paint and some new shingles.

In the city room Oppenheim, Scarsdale, and Rhinelanders were the only members of the staff in evidence, except a police reporter who was just going out. It was nearly eleven o'clock, and Tompkins, who was in better humor than usual, had excused most of his men very early. The paper was full, anyway, and nothing more could get into it, aside from the matter scheduled, unless a big story were to break loose unexpectedly. In that event, of course, the schedule would be smashed ruthlessly. Whole columns of typebars might be thrown out to make room,

and more than one reporter would look in vain the next morning for the yarn he had written.

Now Tompkins came out into the room once more. He was in his shirtsleeves, minus collar, and he mopped the perspiration from his face as he paused back of Oppenheim's desk.

"Break it off," he said; "then get home. There's no need of your writing another word, for it won't get in the paper. I've sent up every line I'm going to, Op. You know what a row the old man raises when we're overset. No, don't even bother about finishing the paragraph. Bite it off where you are, and then throw the page on the floor."

Oppenheim scowled as he ceased hammering the typewriter keys.

"The story's not complete," he argued. "I've got to round it off, Tompkins; I can't leave it in the air."

"De Camp will round it off for you, if you send it upstairs," retorted Tompkins. "Here, let me see it."

He took the final page of Oppenheim's copy, glanced at it, and then crumpled it up between his palms and tossed it under the desk. "Can't help it," he half apologized. "Now if you don't want to be caught on reserve, get out!"

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Oppenheim merely shrugged his shoulders for comment; he put on his collar, necktie and vest, [and, carrying his coat over his arm, departed.

Meanwhile Tompkins was going through much the same procedure with Scarsdale and Rhinelander.

"You men can toss up to see who stays on reserve," he suggested, after he had rudely broken off the threads of their typewritten narratives. "I'll have to keep one of you; I really ought to hold you both. But Maxwell will get in pretty soon, and it's so blamed hot to-night that I'll be as easy as possible. Now settle it between you."

He walked away. Scarsdale and Rhinelander produced coins.

"Heads win," decreed the former, as he tossed his silver piece in the air and let it come down on his desk, Rhinelander doing likewise.

"I win," he shouted, triumphantly; "I get heads."

"No," protested Rhinelander; "it's always the best two out of three. Twice more, old chap; you don't get away quite so easy."

Scarsdale assented with a grimace, and lost the next throw. Then, in the midst of deep

silence, they tossed their coins the third time. Scarsdale got tails, Rhinelander heads.

It was now the latter's turn to shout his triumph, which he did so loudly and shrilly that Dent, in the telegraph room, heard the demonstration and knew well enough what it meant. He had witnessed these noisy exhibitions on numerous occasions, and now, all doors being open to give the air circulation, even the taunting words of Rhinelander reached him.

"Stop that racket!" commanded Tompkins, with an adjective or two. "I've a good mind to keep you both until midnight. Say, Rhinelander, if you want to go home, get out, and get out quick!"

There was a sudden cessation of the uproar. Rhinelander, with a doubtful look toward the night city editor's desk, hurriedly and quietly got inside his collar and coat, gave a hitch to his belt, and tiptoed away in mock seriousness, whispering a touching farewell to the unfortunate Scarsdale.

The latter, now the sole occupant of the city room—with the exception of Tompkins and two idling copy-readers—cooled his wrists under the faucet in the corner, and unrolled his shirt-sleeves leisurely. Then, after polishing his shoes

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with a wad of old newspaper, and arranging his tie with careless indifference, he approached Tompkins' desk. The latter was nearly invisible in a cloud of black tobacco smoke.

"I'm in bad shape," said Scarsdale, with an odd light in his eyes. "I'm really worried about myself, Tompkins."

"What's the matter with you now?" growled the night city editor, regarding the other suspiciously.

"Starving!" said Scarsdale.

Tompkins grunted.

"Here's a banana," he said, reaching toward his desk.

"Never mind!" returned Scarsdale, with a deprecatory gesture. "My doctor never permits me to eat those things. I've got a prescription here that I'd like to have filled. Want to see it?" He made a pretense of hunting through his pockets. "Well, I don't seem to find it," he went on, "but I think I can remember most of the ingredients: pie, coffee, doughnuts——"

Tompkins tossed the rejected banana back to his desk.

"I'll give you two minutes for each," he grumbled, as the smoke about him cleared a little. Tompkins was famous for smoke. It

was said of him that during his earlier career as a reporter he always produced his most brilliant work when eclipsed by tobacco clouds. He was partial to brands that were blackest in fumes. "Two minutes for the pie," he resumed, "two minutes for the coffee, and two for the doughnuts. Now get along, and remember that the city room is empty."

Scarsdale disappeared, and for a little while deep quiet reigned in the huge apartment. Tompkins was smoking and meditating, with his feet on his desk and his head on the back of his chair. The two copy-readers—the others having either been excused for the night or gone out for luncheon—were reading the latest numbers of popular magazines. It was seldom the city room presented such a lonely spectacle so early in the night. More often, it was at its height of activity. True, two or three of the reporters were still absent on assignments, but aside from that, the day's work in the local department was well rounded up.

It was so quiet, indeed, that the far-away clicking of the telegraph instruments down the corridor was audible, and, at times, the sharp, nasal comments of Grimes as he passed opinions on the good or bad qualities of some piece of

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news. Once the authoritative voice of De Camp came from his den, as he shouted through his telephone to the foreman of the composing-room above. De Camp would soon go upstairs himself and stand over the make-up tables for an hour or two, directing the fast movements of the men who shaped the contents of the pages.

From the streets below came the dull night rumble of the city itself. Any one accustomed to the sounds of the metropolis could have told the time of day from them with a fair degree of assurance, even if locked in a pitch-dark dungeon. This night rumble, rising in almost cadence-like rhythm to the seventeenth floor, spoke just as plainly as the chimes of Trinity a few blocks to the southward.

And now the chimes themselves came softly through the upper atmosphere of New York. They played a melancholy air for a minute, and then died into the deep tones of the hour bell.

"Eleven o'clock," observed Tompkins, stretching. "This is the quietest local night we've had for months; but they're hustling hard enough in the telegraph room. That little rat Grimes——"

His characterization of Grimes was interrupted by another bell, infinitely less in volume than the great tones of Trinity, but clear, fast, and silvery.

The notes came from a small gong on the wall back of Tompkins' desk. The night city editor stopped talking, and counted the strokes rather languidly, still resting his head on the back of his chair, and keeping his feet on his desk. The two copy-readers lowered their magazines, and their faces took on a look of passive interest. For a few moments the gong clipped off the strokes as if in a hurry to get through. There was no lingering between notes, as with Trinity's bell. This was something more important. The swift-beating little hammer seemed to say: *Count-me, count-me, count-me—*

Suddenly Tompkins let his feet drop to the floor with a sharp thud. Something brought him quickly to a stiff sitting posture, and he reached automatically for a little book that protruded from a pigeon-hole in his desk.

"It's a theater box!" he said. Then he rapidly turned the leaves of his fire-alarm list, while the silvery gong kept up its clatter.

"It's too late for a theater panic," observed one of the copy-readers, glancing at the clock. "Every audience in the city has been out fifteen minutes, at least."

"All except the West Orient," corrected Tompkins. "There's a spectacular show on up there,

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you know, and it's long-winded. They ought to be just about on the wind-up now. If there should ever be a fire in the West Orient Theater——”

Tompkins paused as he ran his index-finger down the fire-alarm numbers. For a moment he bent over the book, half crouching, half standing, every nerve in his big form drawn tense, every muscle contracted. Then he stood upright, tossing the little book from him with violent impetuosity.

“It is the West Orient!” he exclaimed. Then, with a sweeping glance over the city room, he half shouted, in his great, bear-like roar: “The West Orient is afire, and not a man in the office!”

A moment later he was reaching for his straw hat, on the top of his desk. Without waiting to put on vest, coat, or collar, he wheeled and faced his copy-readers.

“Take care of the office!” he commanded; “I’ll go myself!”

CHAPTER XX

THE GASOLENE HOSE-CAR

THE gong on the wall of the city room was repeating its weird performance as Tompkins strode with mighty steps into the corridor and put his finger on the elevator call-button. He kept it there for a few seconds, and then, hearing the jangle of the signal eight or ten stories below, he rattled the shaft grating savagely, calling down to the elevator man:

"Come on up here, you loafer! Do you think I've got all night to wait? Come along up, I say!"

He shook the bars again, and kicked them. Then, acting on a sudden idea, he turned and bolted toward the telegraph room.

At the moment, every man in this department, having heard the uproar just outside, had paused in his work to glance toward the door. Half a hundred eyes were fixed on his coatless and vestless figure as it stood for a moment framed in the casing. Grimes, also coatless, glanced up

from his desk, holding a long strip of galley-proof; Larrabee, in the act of dealing out some copy to the hawk-nosed man, still held the pages poised in the air; the whiskered copy-reader was flourishing a paste-brush, and stood suddenly motionless, like a living-picture of uncertain title; Dent Lockwood had just written the last line of the head for Charity Brandon's Newport dispatch.

"O Lockwood!" The command came in Tompkins' familiar tone of gruff authority, accentuated now by a tenseness out of the common. "Lockwood! Come along—quick! The Orient Theater's afire!"

There was something irresistibly compelling in Tompkins, despite his hated tyranny. Every man in the city room had felt the spell of his commands, and now Dent arose automatically from his place at the telegraph copy-desk. All the events of the recent weeks seemed to be wiped from the slate, and once more he was a news-soldier under Tompkins, the general. But Dent would have needed no second command, even had this subtle power of Tompkins been lacking. It was a call to arms such as he had dreamed about day and night since the hour he entered the telegraph room.

But Grimes was on his feet, too, his eyes blazing.

"See here, Tompkins!" he nasaled, in tremulous excitement. "See here! You just stick to the city room, will you! My men are not covering fires—do you understand that? This is the telegraph room! You're in the wrong pew!"

The voice of the elevator man, in his cage, reached them.

"All ready, Mr. Tompkins!" he said. "All ready, sir!"

For an instant the night city editor faced the telegraph editor. They were unevenly matched, except in nerve. Tompkins would have made three of Grimes, and in the former's thunderous voice the twang of Grimes' vocal cords could have been drowned as in the roar of Niagara. And now Tompkins spoke with much emphasis, as Dent hesitated, looking from one to the other. To obey Tompkins meant mutiny toward Grimes.

"Get back there, you shriveled piece of journalistic hide!" Tompkins said, to his ancient enemy of the telegraph desk. "Didn't you hear me say that the Orient Theater was on fire! I want that boy, and I mean to have him! Come along, Lockwood!"

Grimes fairly danced in his rage.

"Get out of here, you big bellowing duffer!" he screeched. "Get out quick! You can't come into my department and bullyrag me, sir! You can't take my men away right under my nose! You——"

He put his puny strength against Tompkins' and in his fury, tried to shove the big fellow toward the door. He might as well have tried to push a ton of iron. With a lightning-like move, Tompkins whirled him about, seized him by either shoulder, and ran him back in a quick-step to his chair, planting him there abruptly and with some violence.

"If you interfere with me again, I'll throw you out of the window!" threatened Tompkins, with flaming eyes, as he looked down on the little Grimes, who, just then, was seeing colored stars.

A second later, Tompkins was facing Dent again, as the latter stood in uncertainty where he had paused under Grimes' outburst.

"Lockwood," said the night city editor, speaking fast, "I'll relieve you of the trouble of handing Grimes your resignation. You're not connected with the telegraph room any longer. You're on the city staff again. Come along—quick!"

Together, these two former foes left the room.

Dent was not only coatless, but hatless. The clash with Grimes had taken only a few seconds, and now they were dropped with bullet-like rapidity down the elevator shaft to the lobby off Park Row.

"The West Orient Theater is a fire-trap," said Tompkins, as they were dropping. "If there's a crowd in the upper balconies, there'll be a holocaust unless——"

He had no time to say more at the moment, for the elevator door was opened with a bang and he and Dent stepped out. With Tompkins in the lead and the boy crowding him hard, they ran to the street and crossed the four surface tracks on the jump. It was Tompkins' purpose to take a subway express train to Grand Central, and there catch a local subway to Times Square, one station beyond. Between Park Row and the uptown theater district lay three miles of city streets, portions of them congested even at this hour of the evening. The subway express, which would whirl them a mile a minute under New York, would beat out any taxicab they could get, even could they be fortunate enough to hail one immediately. True, they might have to wait a few minutes for a train, down there in the hole that lay beneath them, but they would

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have to take their chances, so far as that was concerned. Lacking wings, it was the best way to reach the West Orient quickly.

The stairs to the subway lay just under the approach to the Brooklyn Bridge. They had gained its hooded portal, Tompkins still in the lead, when Dent reached out and caught him by the arm.

"Wait!" the boy cried. "Wait a moment, Tompkins—hark!"

Away to the southward they heard the sharp twang of a gong, repeating its alarms with loud insistence and a fast-growing crescendo. Dent ran back to the middle of the roadway and stood for a moment peering into the lights of alley-like Nassau Street.

"It's one of the new gasoline hose-cars," he said, breathlessly. "Those cars can go like the wind. See! she's coming like a hurricane! She'll turn at Chambers and get over to Broadway. Chambers is a fire street, you know. If we can get up to the corner in time, we can flip her!"

Without a word, Tompkins abandoned the subway plan and made for Chambers Street, a short distance above. Tompkins was too big to run to advantage, and the boy quickly took the lead and set the pace. Pell-mell up Center

Street they went, shouting their own alarms for the people to get out of their way. With one accord, the people did get out of the way.

It looked for a few seconds as if Tompkins would miss all chance of catching the hose-car, for it swept up behind so rapidly that he was still some rods from Chambers when it came abreast of him. Dent was already on the corner, in front of the great new Municipal Building, poised at the curb for the spring.

"Come along, Tompkins!" he shouted. "Come along! You'll make it if you spurt! You'll make it; you'll make it!"

Tompkins suddenly lowered his head, threw his shoulders forward, raised his elbows, and did spurt—just as he had known so well how to do in his more youthful and active days. Many a run of this sort had Tompkins made, and it angered him now to know that he had lost some of his old-time prowess, and was forced into the background by a mere boy. He made up his mind to catch the hose-car if it took his last breath to do it.

The corner at Chambers Street was a very narrow one, and consequently the turn very abrupt. The chauffeur of the fire automobile knew this, and slowed down rapidly as he neared

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the dangerous point. The clanging of the gong drowned all other sounds. A policeman ran south in front of the Hall of Records to warn approaching vehicles.

Then, as the hose-car swung around, Dent reached out and caught the hand-rail easily, and stepped upon the running-board. He had taken his newspaper badge from his pocket, where he had carried it since his work in the telegraph room had kept him indoors, and pinned it conspicuously on the bosom of his shirt. The firemen, recognizing this emblem of his calling, made room for him.

"Come along, Tompkins!" the boy repeated, looking back with some anxiety. "Come along—Here, get hold of my hand!"

Tompkins was at the corner now. He reached forth to grip the rail, and missed it; but Dent got him by one hand and a fireman by the other and saved him from going flat on his face in the street. Just then the chauffeur moved his levers and the machine shot ahead. Tompkins was dragged a few yards before he was pulled aboard and set upon his feet, puffing like a laboring locomotive and very red in the face.

"Thanks!" he gasped. "Th-thanks! Now let—let her go as fast as she wa-wants to!"

Tompkins' hat lay back in the street, but he had no thought for such a trifle. He and Dent were aboard the fastest fire-wagon in New York, and he knew it would annihilate the miles and set them down right at the door of the burning theater. There would be no waiting at subway platforms and no changing from one train to another. This was a through car, and a limited one.

"Hang on!" advised Dent's nearest helmeted neighbor. "Get a good grip; we're going to swing into Broadway. Here you!"—this to Tompkins—"never trust to one hand on a turn. It might throw your shoulder out of joint. Put up that mop and look out for yourself!"

Tompkins had been sopping his face with his handkerchief in a vain attempt to keep down the perspiration that streamed from it, but now he took the proffered advice, and none too soon.

The corner was wider here, and the hose-car went around it at a fifteen-mile pace, swaying and skidding until it came near bumping against the west curb. Two or three automobiles were in the block ahead, but they were getting out of the way as fast as they could. For once, the arrogant chauffeurs thought it wise to give up the right-of-way to others. A huge express wagon

had edged half-way on the sidewalk, its driver bawling at his frightened horses to get over farther and make room for the fire apparatus. The few pedestrians on this part of Broadway were seeking the shelter of doorways, or running toward the farther cross-streets to escape a possible mix-up.

The fire chauffeur was trained to keep his head, and to take chances. Even for an ordinary alarm, he sometimes ran desperate risks; it was part of the game. But this was no ordinary alarm. It was one of those calls that came rarely, and carried with it the direst of possibilities. An alarm from a theater box thrills even the firemen.

CHAPTER XXI

THE GREAT WHITE WAY

THERE was no speed law to hold down the fire automobile. The only law that limited its wild career up "the great white way" was the law of mechanics that indicated seventy miles an hour as its capacity. True, its speedometer was gaged up to eighty, but that was a theoretical notch. Seventy miles an hour over a city street was considered about the best a car could be expected to do, even when the lives of a thousand people might hang on its coming.

Whether or not the hose-car traveled at its maximum now, Dent had no means of knowing, for he could not see the white dial with its trembling finger; but he did know that the pace they took was a death-defying one, and the thrill of the flight up Broadway made his heart beat fast and pump deep.

For a time, their way lay through the wholesale district mainly, with small retail shops, and some larger ones, scattered along on both sides—

all dark and deserted. The noisy clamor of the gong sent its warning far ahead, and the way was clear. At some of the street intersections Dent could see teams and automobiles huddled out of the path of the red demon that swept past them, and at Great Jones Street the hose-car had to swerve around an underground-trolley car, which could not get out of the way. The boy's arms seemed to be half wrenched from their sockets by the bounding of the springs, but a moment later the fire chauffeur got his contrivance back on the smooth car tracks, and they settled down again into their straight-away flight. A few moments later they swooped past Grace Church.

At Union Square—once a pauper graveyard far beyond the limits of the city—they had to come down to a safer pace, for Fourteenth Street, where they entered the semi-circle, was well filled with vehicles and street-cars. This was "Deadman's Curve," and, despite the lessened speed of the hose-car, Dent thought for a few seconds that the nickname would prove itself well taken.

By the same sort of magic by which the helmsman at sea steers his craft through the shoals, the fire chauffeur circled Union Square and once

more gained the straight stretch of Broadway. At Twenty-third Street—where Fifth Avenue crossed their path diagonally and the very heart of the metropolis seemed to throb—they were stopped abruptly by a line of surface cars that was blocked on the intersection. Dent saw a policeman jump to the front platform of one car and, with his night-stick brandished over the motorman, force the line to move back and make a passageway.

Then they bolted forward again, skirting the Flatiron Building on the left and the deep shades of Madison Square on the right. At Sixth Avenue a gasoline hook-and-ladder truck turned into Broadway just ahead of them, and went thundering northward with shrieking siren. A ponderous contrivance it was, and the hose-car, with a challenging gong, passed it within a block.

It seemed to Dent now, as he squinted through his dust-inflamed eyes, that every street they crossed held some rushing detachment of fire-fighters. Everywhere, he caught the clang-clang of the gongs, and got glimpses of giant affairs with sparks flowing from them, or horses straining fiercely at their straps, or mighty red ladders and nozzles swaying toward the common center. These engines of rescue came into Broad-

way in front and behind the hose-car, and now the speed of the latter was slackened accordingly. Just ahead lay Long Acre Square, jammed with automobiles that had been awaiting the theater multitude. It seemed as if ten thousand blinding eyes were blazing down Broadway, while overhead, high on the roofs of buildings, the flashing electrical signs made the night red and green with splendor.

Most of the theaters were closed for the hot months, and the lights in front of the West Orient, down Forty-second Street, stood out all the more conspicuously. Forty-second Street now was a bedlam. Fire-engines were already at work there, and others were pulling in at all the street crossings; lines of hose coiled themselves over the pavements like great slimy serpents, and writhed and grew taut as the water swept through them. At one hydrant a leak sent a spurting shower across the street and drenched every one who came within reach.

The gasoline hose-car, having made its spectacular run up Broadway, now turned into Forty-second Street and found its station amid the seeming confusion. Its crew quickly disappeared, dragging their lines of hose with them. Tompkins and Dent, with aching arms and ears

that still rang from the wind that had whistled into them, made their way through the police lines, by the grace of their badges, and stood, at length, before the doomed playhouse.

From this vantage-point, there was not much indication of a disastrous fire. No flames were to be seen, and the smoke was not heavy, though a pungent odor of burning wood filled the air. One unfamiliar with such things might have imagined that nothing worse than a small blaze and a scare had occurred. But Tompkins and Dent saw the signs of something else. Long leads of hose were being dragged into the theater through the front entrance; ladders were going up; and a mighty water-tower was slowly rising, preparatory to sending its demolishing floods through the upper windows or on to the roof. Out in the road a voice was shouting hoarse orders through a megaphone.

In the thick of all this, Tompkins paused, looking the situation over with the eyes of a man who knows what he sees. It had been years since Tompkins had covered a fire in person, but the old days—days in which he had gloried—came back to him. Many a day, and many a night, had he braved flame and water and falling walls to get the news for his paper. Tompkins had rev-

eled in these dare-devil assignments. They had been to his rough nature what bursting shells and shrieking cannon-balls were to old warriors.

Nor was Dent without experience. He knew very well what a fire assignment meant. During the preceding winter he had frosted the tips of his fingers and waded in ice-water and stood in showers of broken glass in order to get lists of names from smoke-obscured lobby directories, or to follow the work of the firemen. He had seen heroic rescues, and thrilling leaps from upper stories; and the meaning of it all, as he stood there in the street with his superior, was not lost on him. Winter or summer, the horrors of fire ever come very near to the news-gatherer.

The fire, somebody said, had started from a spotlight in the wings. The audience had escaped as the steel curtain went down over the flames that leaped out upon the stage. Nobody was hurt seriously; everybody was out. At least, such was the common report.

"Come along," said Tompkins, to his aid. "Come along, Lockwood; let's go in and see for ourselves."

CHAPTER XXII

THE THIRD GALLERY

A GIANT policeman at the door stopped them for a moment, but waved them past as he saw their credentials. A moment later they stood in the vast auditorium, in which the lights were still burning. Even here, there was not much evidence of what had happened, except little tongues of fire that crept out around the edges of the steel curtain, like snakes' fangs. Faintly, they heard the crackling of flames within the wings.

Dent sighed with relief as he gazed about the empty auditorium.

"At any rate," he said, "we'll have no list of dead and injured. He stepped aside to get out of the way of some firemen who came dragging a lead of hose down the aisle. "Still," he went on, speaking from a newspaper standpoint, "there's bound to be a good panic story in it, anyhow, isn't there? Hadn't I better get out and find some of the people who were in here?"

Tompkins did not answer on the moment.

Instead, he moved down the aisle almost to the orchestra pit, Dent following. The heat back of the steel curtain almost blistered their faces.

"Let the panic story wait for a few minutes," he said, turning and running his eyes along the wide balconies, three of them, that rose in circling tiers into the dim regions under the roof. "I never take anybody's word for these things. There may be people up there yet. It's our business to make certain. We'll go up into those balconies. You take the right stairway, Lockwood, and I'll take the left. Go clear to the top gallery; and don't take anything for granted. Search the tiers to the middle aisle and make sure that no one has fainted or been trampled on. And say, Lockwood!" Tompkins called to the boy warningly as the latter was moving away. "Say, Lockwood, don't waste any time—only be thorough! There's no time to lose. The fire may burst through into the auditorium any minute; I've known the flames to jump across in one swing and take hold of the balconies—they did that at the Iroquois Theater in Chicago a few years ago. The people up there were caught in a trap. Get back down as quickly as you can; I'll meet you out in front, on the street."

Dent ran toward the right stairway leading from the foyer to the first balcony. The heavily carpeted stairs, curving upward between elaborately decorated walls set with statuary, seemed strangely deserted. A woman's hat lay where it had fallen, and a little farther up Dent saw a glove. Mute evidences, these, of the hasty exit. At the top of the stairs were more of these signs of the panic. A box of chocolates had been upset and trampled on, and a girl's slipper lay with the strap torn half off.

Without wasting a thought on such trifles, however, Dent began his search between the rows of opera-chairs. Running as fast as he could, he doubled back and forth until he had gone from the last row at the rear clear to the rail over the parquet. He was certain nobody had been left behind.

"It's all right here!" he called to Tompkins, whom he saw on the other side of the balcony. "It's all right here; I'm going on up."

The second stairway was narrower, and the carpeting less velvety. The signs of panic were more numerous here. There were many crushed hats and scattered gloves, but Dent's search bore no fruit otherwise.

Tompkins was not visible now, but Dent gave

him only a passing thought. There was one more balcony to be explored, and the boy looked anxiously toward the steel curtain. It was rimmed with flame, and he knew the stage was a seething cauldron. Only this metal barrier and the fire-walls abutting it kept the destroyer at bay. But how long could anything keep back this savage arch-fiend? he wondered. Once it found an opening, it would break all bonds and come leaping into the open.

Most of the smoke had found an exit through the roof over the stage, but there was enough of it here in the second balcony to half choke him, and to irritate his eyes until he could see only through a mist. Nevertheless, he hunted for a stairway that would take him still higher. To his surprise, he could not find one. Then, suddenly, he remembered that the third gallery opened upon a separate passageway. Once or twice, in his boyhood days, he had gone up there himself with some of his schoolmates, and he recalled that after the show the outgoing gallery crowd had been diverted to a corridor that led to the fire-escape stairs.

Just then he heard the splintering of wood on the other side of the balcony, and, running across through the fast-gathering smoke, he saw

Tompkins kicking and battering at a small door. For a minute it withstood the ferocious rushes of the big fellow, but presently it gave in, revealing, dimly, a steep and narrow flight of stairs leading upward. It was the ushers' private means of passage between the main body of the theater and the isolated section at the top.

Tompkins gave one more kick, and the door fell from its broken hinges and lock.

"I'll look out for the sky-heaven," he said, with his customary brusqueness now merged into a huskiness. "You go back. It's getting uncomfortable up here. I'll take a quick look around, and then go down the fire-escape way. You'd better get up into the Liberty Building next door, high enough to look down on the fire; that'll give you a chance to see what the firemen are doing; you can tell what the outlook is. Then go down in front again and I'll meet you there. Scarsdale ought to be here by this time, and some of the police reporters. If you see any of them, tell them to wait for me on the sidewalk."

"It's getting pretty smoky up there, Tompkins, warned Dent, as he peered once more up the narrow stairs. "Look out for yourself——"

"Go along, or I'll beat you down," interrupted

the other. "Pick up all the incidents you can, and——"

The remainder of the sentence was lost, for Tompkins was already half-way up the stairs, and even his substantial figure was almost hidden in the smoke. For a few seconds the boy stood in doubt, half inclined to disobey orders and follow his superior to the third gallery. It seemed almost like desertion to let Tompkins go up there alone. Still, he knew that Tompkins would be angry were his commands disregarded, and, having regained his place on the city staff in a manner so unexpected, Dent was fearful of bringing down on himself Tompkins' wrath afresh. He turned and made his way to the main floor, and out to the street, as fast as he could go.

Sure enough, Scarsdale was there, in company with a group of reporters from other newspapers. They had corralled the stage carpenter and were getting his excited narrative of the fire's origin. Briefly communicating Tompkins' orders to his fellow-worker, Dent hurried along to the Liberty Building, as Tompkins had told him to do.

This towering structure was devoted chiefly to offices and upper-floor workrooms of various sorts, and it rose many stories above the West

Orient Theater. In front, the walls of the two joined, but half-way back they separated, leaving a narrow rectangular court between. Ordinarily, the Liberty Building was locked and barred at night, but the watchman had opened it for the firemen, and now, as Dent entered, he stepped over a dozen leads of hose that had been carried up the stairway. They were strained to their utmost with the pressure inside, and the leaks at the joints had already turned the stone stairs into a terraced waterfall.

None of the elevators were running, and Dent climbed the dark stairs, feeling his way through the water that rushed down, or getting a glimmer of light now and then from a fireman's lantern. He was quickly soaked to the skin from the escaping spray from the couplings, and, as he reached the top of the third flight, the smoke from the burning theater blew in from an open stairway window and came near strangling him. In some alarm he paused and put out his head for air.

Just then the heavens were suddenly illumined by a red glow, as the flames on the stage burst through the roof and leaped high into the darkness. Then, for the first time, did Dent realize why a second and third alarm had gone out.

It seemed to him, as he stood for a moment gasping there at the window, that nothing short of a miracle could stay the tremendous volume of fire that seemed to sweep over the parapet of the Liberty Building and reach to the sky itself. High above him, in the lurid glow, he could see streams of water leaping across from the upper windows of the taller building into the furnace, but they seemed puny, indeed, and, so far as he could judge, had no effect whatever.

From the roof of another building at the rear of the theater, Dent could see still other streams—a score of them—all directed toward a common center; and at times, when the wind shifted momentarily, the long, leaping forks of flame seemed to dart out and envelop the daring firemen who held the nozzles. Once he saw them forced back by the fiery enemy, but they rallied and advanced valiantly to the attack. Then the smoke hid them. From above he heard a battalion chief shouting orders through his trumpet, and for a moment he grew giddy for air, and clawed wildly at the window. It seemed as if the whole volume of smoke had been diverted suddenly into the stairway where he stood. Below, in the theater, he heard the dull boom of falling walls.

The suffocating fumes cleared, but a new horror had hold of the boy. Where was Tompkins? Dent was sure that the fire had broken through into the auditorium. As he still stood there at the window, he could see the glow of the flames in a new spot. If Tompkins were still up there under the roof, he was surely doomed. Even now, as he looked, the crimson was staining a high row of windows—the highest row of all. The third gallery was on fire!

Dent had hated Tompkins; the man had aroused in him all the repugnance and animosity of which he was capable. Since the day he had taken his place on the *Sentinel* staff as the cub reporter, Tompkins had thrown obstacles and discouragements in his way at every opportunity. This news-gathering career was hard enough, at best, it seemed to him, but Tompkins had made it very much harder. The man was singularly lacking in all those finer qualities that make the world go smoothly, and all the vitriol of his nature had been poured upon Dent's unhappy head. But now all this was forgotten. The boy remembered Tompkins only as he had seen him a few minutes before, going up into that deadly cloud in the upper gallery—going up there with his life at stake on the bare chance of

saving somebody who might have succumbed to the fright or crush of the panic. Dent had heard many tales of Tompkins' deeds during his reportorial career, and this fitted in perfectly. Whatever Tompkins lacked in diplomacy or sympathetic leadership, he offset by his self-sacrificing courage. Once more he was in his element; that element was danger.

But the chances, Dent reflected, were in Tompkins' favor. No doubt he had gone down the fire-escape before the flames swept across to the upper gallery. Most likely he was already down on the sidewalk in front, apportioning the news-getting tasks among such of his men as might be there. Every available reporter, Dent knew, would be hurried out to Forty-second Street as fast as possible.

Yes, Tompkins undoubtedly was safe, and Dent resolved to retrace his steps at once down the dark and slippery stairs, and report to his chief what he had seen from his vantage-point.

But just at that moment a current of wind, created by the vortex of fire, sent the smoke clear of the court into which the boy was looking, and directly across, huddled on the upper landing of the iron stairs of the fire-escape, was Tompkins himself. Nor was he alone. At his feet lay the

limp form of a small girl, and back of him, half out the doorway that led to the gallery, was a man's prostrate figure. Then the smoke settled back once more, hiding them.

Below, where the fire-escape turned at the second balcony, a bright red tongue of fire wound itself about the hand-rail and seemed to climb the stairs as a stealthy but deadly foe might have done. Tompkins was cut off from escape.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BRIDGE

THE glare from the conflagration now lighted up the third-floor corridor of the Liberty Building, revealing to Dent's anxious scrutiny a long, tunnel-like stretch of tile and stone, devoid of anything whatever that could be used for a bridge to the fire-escape. He ran the length of the hall in vain, and then, putting his head out of the window again, shouted loudly for help. If only he had a ladder up there, it would be a simple matter to throw it across the court and take Tompkins and the others off. But the ladders—plenty of them—were all down on the street in front. Could he hope to get down there and give the alarm in time? He was sure he could not.

Once more he shouted, but the rushing noise of the flames and the hissing of the water made his voice quite inaudible; he could scarcely hear it himself. He must do something else besides shout. Once more he turned back to the corridor.

With his fists he smashed the glass in one of the doors, and put his eyes to the opening. Dimly he could see the furnishings of the room. There was nothing except desks and chairs and letter-files.

Running to the door of the suite adjoining, he shattered the glass here; inside he saw only the counters and paraphernalia of a furrier's shop. There was a low stepladder in one corner, but he knew it would not reach. The chasm to be bridged was ten or twelve feet.

Then, for a period that seemed endless, the smoke outside shut out the glow of the fire and left him in utter darkness. He groped his way down the corridor, and, finding still another glass door, he beat upon it with his bare hands and sent the fragments clattering to the floor in a noisy jangle. He knew his hands were slimy with blood, but he gave them no thought. Would the crimson light never come back?

It did come back in a few seconds, brighter than ever, and filled the boy with new terror and energy. Something else, too, gave instant direction to his impulses. Inside this room he saw that calciminers had been at work. At the further side he beheld two long planks that had formed part of a scaffolding.

To smash out more of the glass and get through the opening, was the task of a moment. Darting across the room, he seized one of the planks. Its weight dismayed him, but he carried it to the door and shoved it through the hole he had made, following with breathless haste. A piece of jagged glass caught his shirt and tore a ragged rent, and he felt the blood flowing from a deep wound in his shoulder. It ran down his back and over his chest, and he could see it dyeing his garments the color of the flames themselves.

At the window, he hesitated. He feared he could not get the heavy plank across the court by himself. It was sixteen feet long, he judged, and he would have considerable leverage, but should he fail—— No, he could take no chances of dropping the bridge, now that he had it! He must get help. Vainly he looked up and down the stairs. Not a fireman was in sight.

He dragged the plank to the window-sill and shoved it out a few feet, so that if Tompkins should get a momentary glimpse through the smoke, he might see that aid was coming. Then, leaning far out himself, he called, as loudly as he could:

“O Tompkins! O Tompkins!”

To his surprise, he got an answer; very faint

and far away it seemed, amid the noise of the fire, but perfectly audible:

"Get that plank over here—quick! What—what's the matter with you?"

It was Tompkins, beyond question—the Tompkins of old. A grim smile was on the boy's lips as he peered across into the black, eddying fumes.

"Hello, there!" he shouted. "Can you reach over and get hold of the end when I shove it out? If you can——"

An uncomplimentary adjective reached him from the other side, sounding very much like "addled-headed" something or other. The words that followed were lost in the roar of fire just beyond, but a second later he caught Tompkins' voice again:

"Where's that plank, I say? Can't you see that I'm hanging out here in midair, waiting for it?"

At that moment the smoke blew aside, revealing the big night city editor on the outer side of the fire-escape, hanging by one arm and foot while he reached into space, toward the Liberty Building.

Dent abandoned his plan of going for help. Instead, he shoved the plank outward as fast

as he could, shouting to Tompkins as he did so:

"It's coming! It's coming!"

When he had worked it out as far as he dared in this fashion, he took up his position at the extreme inner end, bearing his weight on the plank as he extended it inch by inch toward the fire-escape. The smoke again hid Tompkins, but the boy continued to work with frantic energy. Slowly the prospective bridge moved across the chasm, its weight increasing momentarily and filling the boy with dire apprehension. What if Tompkins could not reach it before the leverage was overcome by its gravity? In that event, the fire that was now going up the iron stairs faster and faster would surely envelop him before other help could be had. Dent regretted that he had not followed his first impulse and run down to the street with the alarm.

But this was no time for regrets. Out went the plank another inch, and another. It was so heavy by this time that he could move it only by jerks from side to side; its swaying end, protruding outside the window, almost balanced his weight as he lay upon it with his feet barely touching the floor. Could Tompkins reach it?

Through the flame-tinted smoke he saw an object move along the hand-rail of the fire-

escape, and the next moment the weight of the plank was relieved. Tompkins had it! A thrill of thankfulness swept over the boy as he shoved the bridge along, while Tompkins pulled at the other end. Then he heard a shout:

"Hold up! far enough!"

He paused, exhausted and out of breath. A sudden weakness beset him, but he rallied himself. He was not done yet. Getting on the plank on hands and knees, he crawled cautiously out over the dizzy height. He could not see the ground at first, but a moment later the smoke-clouds parted and gave him a view of the cement floor of the court. Directly below him stood a group of firemen, looking up. Then a shout arose, followed by cries from half a dozen throats. Somebody far above, in a window of the Liberty Building, answered. A battalion chief thundered a megaphone command. Then the swirling flames on the fire-escape seemed to reach out in desperation for Tompkins, who was standing on the top landing with the unconscious child in his arms.

Dent crawled along, conquering his terror and bodily rebellion, until he could lay his hand on the iron rail.

"Here!" he cried, still on his hands and knees.



"YES, I CAN HOLD HIM. I—I'M ALL RIGHT! THERE!"—Page 247

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"Here, Tompkins! Put that girl over here on the plank! I've got her! All right! Let her go!"

The bridge was not more than eighteen inches wide, and he dared not stand up; backing like a crawfish and dragging the small figure after him with one hand, he retraced his way to the Liberty Building. Below, on the stairs, he heard shouts, but he merely dropped his burden inside on the floor and once more began his perilous journey to the fire-escape. There was no time to wait for others, no matter how near they might be. A second or two might tell the story. It seemed, as he glanced across, that Tompkins was in the very midst of the fire. It was leaping all about him, and, as the boy approached the iron landing the second time, the lapping tongues snapped in his very face and blistered it. The air he breathed burned his throat.

"Put him over the rail!" he cried, as he reached up, shielding his face with his arm. "Yes, I can hold him, Tompkins. I—I'm all right! There! I've got him by the coat collar. He isn't dead, is he? Now come along yourself—quick! Down on your knees, Tompkins! Down! Down! Look out for yourself! Just steady his feet, will you, and I'll get him across! That's right! Are you much burned, Tompkins?"

This last question he asked as he backed across the treacherous bridge once more, this time finding it harder to drag his burden after him. Tompkins was coming, too, creeping along unsteadily, with the disappointed red fangs still trying to get him. He swayed at times, as if about to topple headlong to the cement court, but he braced himself with stiffened elbows, and clung to the plank. That he was burned, needed no telling. His shirt was scorched black, and his face, swarthy of itself, looked like a negro's.

And yet Tompkins presented a spectacle scarcely more terrifying than Dent himself. The boy was stained red from head to foot, as if he had been dipped in some liquid dye. His face, smeared from his bloody hands, might have been that of a Bluebeard. Thus these two erstwhile foes retreated foot by foot across the abyss, Dent moving backward, Tompkins forward, while the senseless figure between them lay on its back and offered no remonstrance to its unsteady gait. Foes the two creeping men were no longer, but friends for life.

A dozen arms reached out at the window and dragged Dent inside, and a dozen other arms took in the prostrate man, and then Tompkins.

Through the blood and sweat that blinded him, Dent saw the hulking forms of many firemen, and the wondering faces of newspaper men, and then he heard the familiar voice of an ambulance surgeon:

"Sit down here, Lockwood, and let me see what you've done to yourself."

But Dent, who was standing against the wall, trying hard to find air enough to breathe, merely gasped:

"Never—never mind me, Doc! I—I can wait. Tomp—Tompkins needs you!"

Tompkins, huddled on the floor with his back to the elevator grating, raised his head at this. Looking up into the flicker of a lantern, he growled:

"Look after the girl! She's alive, I tell you—they're both alive! Get to work on them quick! What kind of half-done doctor are you, anyway?"

So saying, Tompkins tried to get on his feet, like a bull that has been desperately wounded, but fell back, after a struggle, and lay on the floor uttering uncomplimentary things in his well-known vocabulary. Many weeks were destined to elapse before Tompkins would have much to say about anything again.

CHAPTER XXIV

A NEW CUB

AT one o'clock of the same night the city room of the *Sentinel* presented a spectacle very different from the dreamy quiet it had exhibited two hours earlier. Two hours may mean extraordinary things in a newspaper office.

Tompkins' desk remained just as he had left it, and his chair stood empty in the very spot where he had shoved it back when he caught the alarm from the theater box; Hopson, however, was at his own desk nearby, and on that desk lay the first galley-proofs of the fire story. Hopson had gone home early in the evening, and was enjoying his well-earned repose when the jangling of his telephone aroused him, and called him back to take charge of the city room. It was no new experience to Hopson to be called out, and he knew very well where to get a taxicab in a hurry. It was a new experience, however, to find Tompkins absent.

Hopson had not been the only man called from

home in this fashion, or, if not from home, then from some cheerful all-night café that made a specialty of serving newspaper men with juicy sirloins and mince-pie at midnight or later. More than one such sirloin had been left unfinished, and many a steaming-hot pie untasted.

Now the clattering typewriters were shaping the narrative of the fire, from all its aspects. Oppenheim was writing the lead; Gilicuddy was telling the main story of the panic; Putnam and Scarsdale had the stage end of it; McNaught and Wight described the thing from the viewpoint of the fire department; Rhinelander and Maxwell had a batch of interviews with persons who had been in the audience; Farlahan—who for the nonce was forced to eschew politics and lend his graphic style to the night's feature—was given a column and a half in which to tell the melodramatic story of the third gallery. Hopson was forced to suspend the unwritten law that marked newspaper men for obscurity. The bridge to the fire-escape could not be ignored, nor could Tompkins or Dent. On this night they were more than "*Sentinel* men." They stood out in their own identities, just as if they had been a part of the great metropolis, instead

of mere historians whose duty it was to make a daily record of it. Nor did Farlahan hesitate to make it clear in his narrative that both Tompkins and Lockwood belonged to the *Sentinel*. He smiled as he coupled their names, for he remembered full well the scene in the city room in which these two had clashed over the Tammany story. To play them up now as joint heroes, bordered on comedy—or would have, perhaps, had not Tompkins been up in the hospital, with the future holding the ultimate outcome.

A lively, spirited scene it was in the city room, but Dent—who sat beside Farlahan and described for him the events of the bridge—viewed it with melancholy eyes. His old ill-fortune seemed to have followed him. He had a stirring story to tell—but he could not write any part of it. The tight bandages about his shoulders made it quite impossible to use his arms at the typewriter; besides, the doctor had ordered him home the instant he finished with Farlahan. He ought to be in the hospital himself, the surgeon had told him. He was taking chances by disobeying.

But Dent had taken very desperate chances that night, and now the old longing to write

afflicted him. As he looked about at the noisy scene, he felt that Fate had played its usual trick. Why was it, he asked himself, that these resistless forces were always at work to keep him out of the channels he was determined to follow. He had mapped out a path for himself through life, but he was having a battle to travel it. And there was Grimes this very minute, with a nasal allurements to go back to the telegraph room! Never! Dent told himself—and he told Grimes the same thing.

“You’ll change your mind,” laughed the telegraph editor, lighting a cigarette.

The schedule for the *Sentinel’s* make-up that night had been smashed to smithereens, and many of Grimes’ dispatches had been cut down to ridiculous dimensions or killed altogether. No longer was the telegraph room busy. The copy-readers over there had gone home, and De Camp had warned Grimes against sending up another line of copy unless the President of the United States, out on Puget Sound, should be assassinated. In that event, De Camp obligingly agreed, Grimes could wire Waterman to put a thousand words on the wire. Grimes had sniffed his disdain—but the fact remained that he had nothing more to do but wait for the

very improbable assassination of the President. Once more the city room held the stage.

"You'll change your mind," Grimes repeated, when he had inhaled his cigarette smoke for a moment and blown it out through his nostrils. "The telegraph room is the place for you, my boy; you're cut out for it. You're pretty fair already at writing heads, and you seem to take to the foreign stories like a duck to water. I'm going to let you handle cable stuff, chiefly; and as soon as you're able to work again, I'll make your salary twenty-five a week. Oh, you'll get another raise before long——"

"No!" Dent tried to hold up a protesting hand, and winced with the pain. "No, I tell you, Mr. Grimes, I'm back on the city staff, and I'm going to stick there. I don't want your old telegraph job. I tell you, I won't have it! I'm a writer, Grimes. Can't you understand? Oh, I know I'm only a cub, but some day——"

"O Lockwood!"

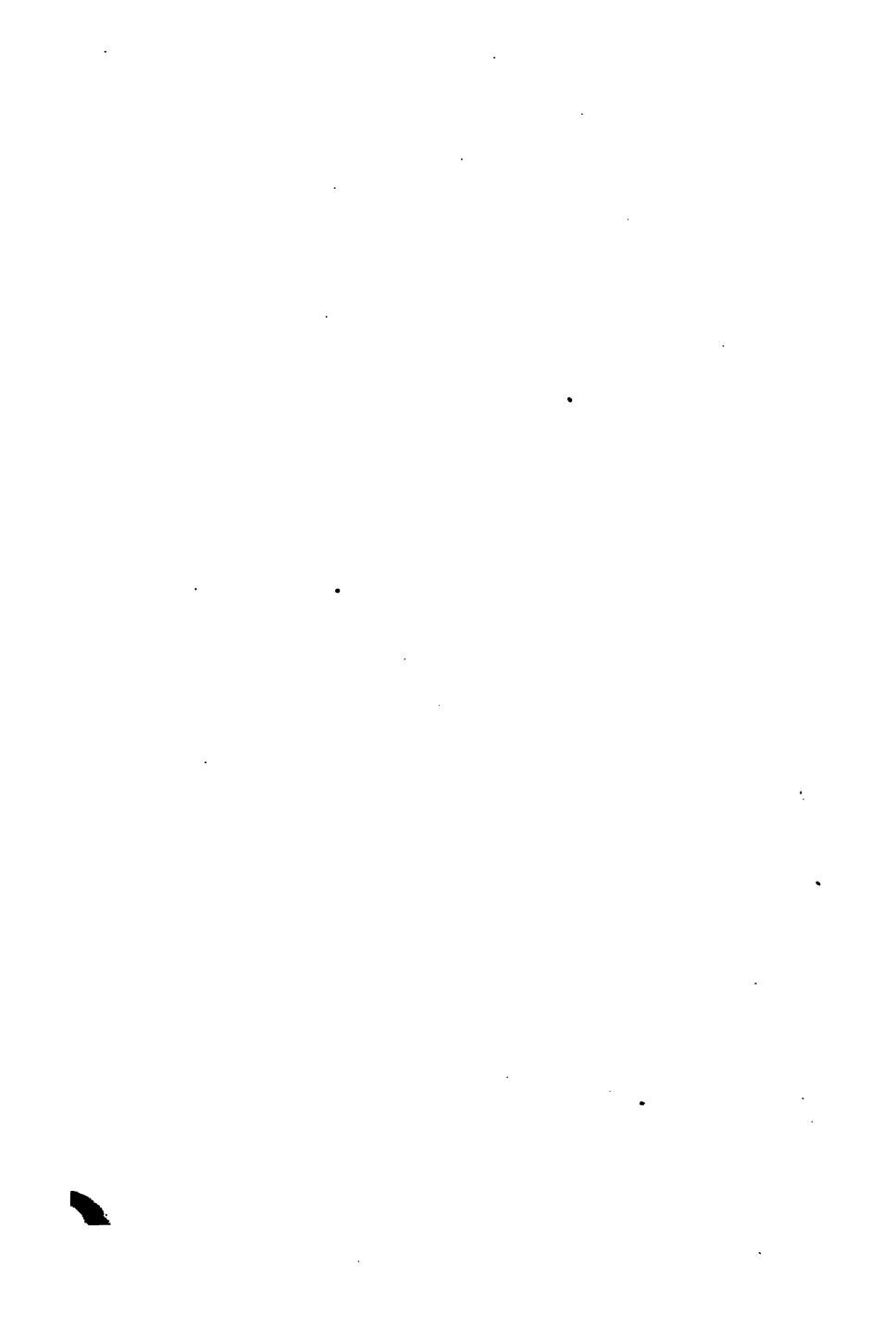
It was Hopson's voice that interrupted. Waving Grimes aside, the boy responded with all his old-time alacrity. It was the first chance Hopson had found to call him since his unwelcome attachment to the telegraph room.

And now Dent stood once more before the city

editor, just as he had stood so often in former days. Big and stalwart he looked for a cub reporter, and, just at the moment, rather disreputable in appearance. His blood-saturated clothes had been replaced by garments loaned him at the hospital where his wound was dressed, and they were not by any means the scrupulous, well-fitting clothes he was accustomed to wear. Besides, there were blisters on his face, where the flames had struck at him over the fire-escape, and his right hand was wholly concealed under a bandage. There was an unwonted pallor in his cheeks, too; but, as he stood facing Hopson, it changed into pink. The message the city editor had for him was enough to make any fellow change color.

"Lockwood," said Hopson, looking up from his galley-proof, "I just wanted to say to you that I've got a young chap coming on the staff to-morrow who has a notion he'd like to be a newspaper man. Of course, you know that one cub reporter is all I can stand; so when you get well enough to take assignments you'll have to be on the regular staff."

THE END.



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